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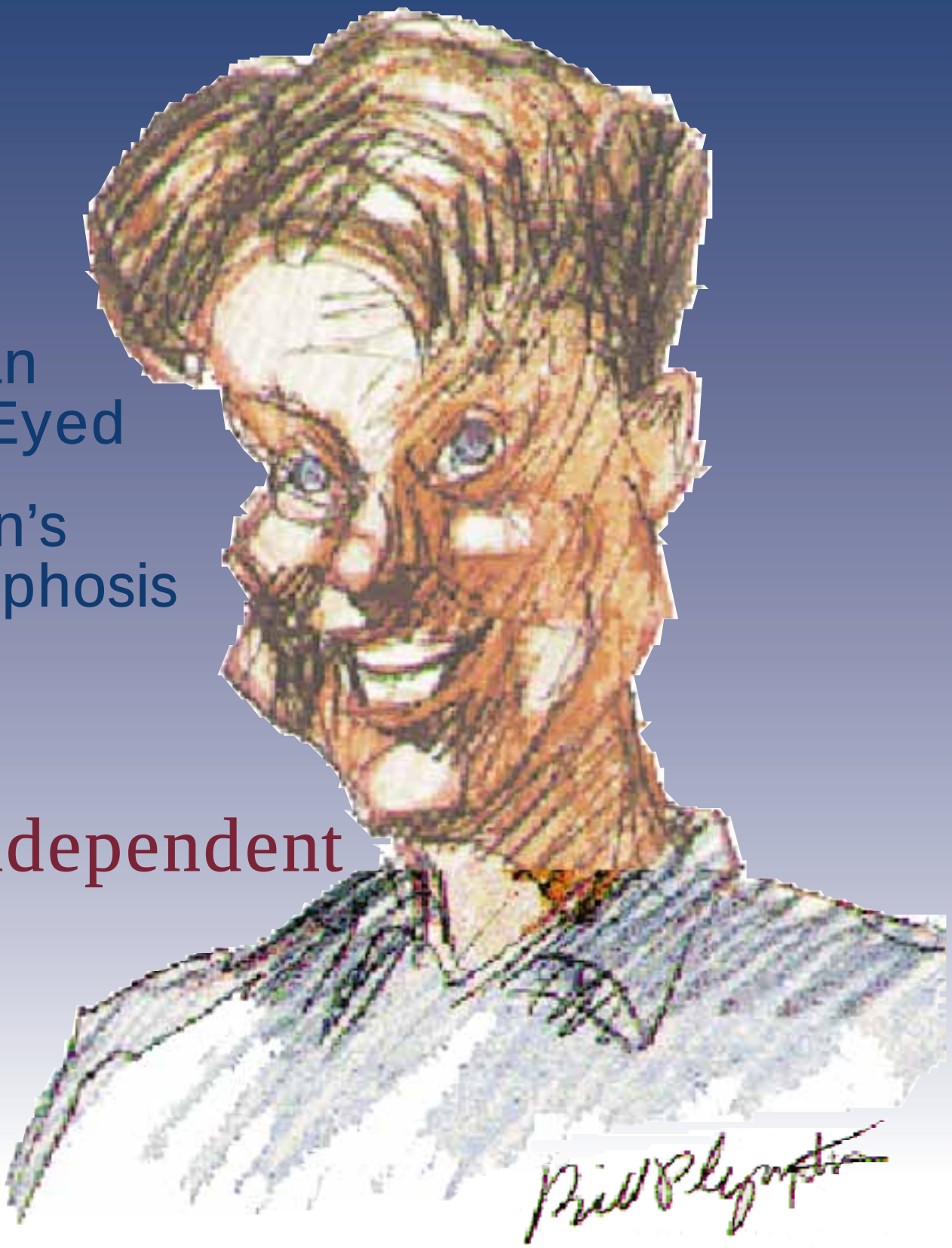

Blechman Goggle-Eyed

Plympton's Metamorphosis

The Independent Spirit

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EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

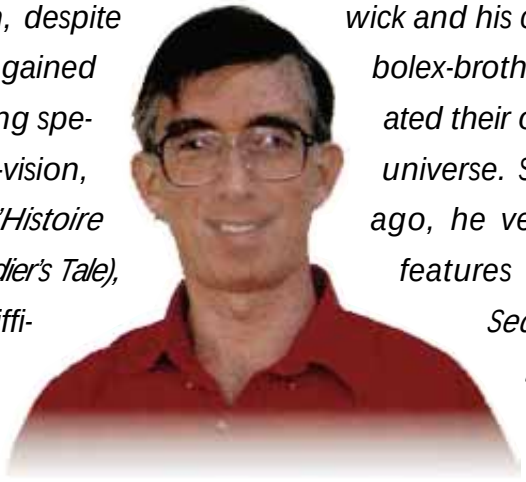
The Independent Spirit

The terms "independent" and "feature film" are not often thought of in the same breadth when it comes to animation. The conventional wisdom still sees independent animators as filmmakers who toil away producing highly personal and/or experimental short subjects. Unlike their live-action counterparts, making an animated feature is seen as beyond the scope (financial and otherwise) of most animation artists.

The truth is that there is a growing number of animators who are making feature films outside the mainstream. Some have gained funding from television, specialized distributors or even out of their own pockets. In this issue, we look at a sampling of filmmakers who have taken various roads to making independent features.

Perhaps the most persistent of independents in this area is Bill Plympton, whose wild and wacky shorts have given him an almost cult following. Although his first feature effort, The Tune, was far from a runaway success, its initial box office reception has not stopped him from going ahead with I Married a Strange Person. Mark Segall recently visited Plympton at work in New York and reports back in "Plympton's Metamorphoses."

R.O. Blechman, despite the critical acclaim gained by his two hour-long specials for public tele-vision, Simple Gifts and L'Histoire du Soldat (The Soldier's Tale), has still found it difficult to find backing for his various feature projects. In his rather uppity and cutting essay, "Transfixed and Goggle-Eyed," he ponders the current state of feature animation and of the hold Disney has on the psyche and pocketbooks of Hollywood and filmgoers alike.



The iconoclastic Brothers Quay have long been known for their stop motion puppet films. However, their entry into features was recently made via the live-action The Institute Benjamenta, which also includes animation. Suzanne Buchan, in "Shifting Realities," reports why the medium's most famous twins, despite appearances to the contrary, are not about to abandon animation.

Elsewhere in England, Dave Borthwick has a habit of using live-action actors as animated puppets. Combined with conventional stop motion model animation, Borthwick and his colleagues at bolex-brothers have created their own pixilated universe. Several years ago, he ventured into features with The Secret Adventures of Tom Thumb, and in "Instinctive Decisions," discusses his methods and his plans for the future with Frankie Kowalski.

Although it may be hard to conceive of Don Bluth as an independent, his apostasy in leaving Disney back in 1979 to go on his own was very much an act of independence. It was also a move that generated considerable enthusiasm and hope for the future of animation. Jerry Beck, who was a sometimes close witness to these events recalls what it was like in his "Don Bluth Goes Independent."

In "Lotte Reiniger," William Moritz chronicles the career of one of animation's truly great pioneers.

ANIMATION WORLD NETWORK
6525 Sunset Blvd.,
Garden Suite 10
Hollywood, CA 90028
Phone : 213.468.2554
Fax : 213.464.5914
Email : info@awn.com

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ANIMATION WORLD MAGAZINE
editor@awn.com

PUBLISHER
Ron Diamond, President
Dan Sarto, Chief Operating Officer

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Harvey Deneroff

ASSOCIATE EDITOR/PUBLICITY
Frankie Kowalski

CONTRIBUTORS :
Jerry Beck
R.O. Blechman
Suzanne Buchan
Harvey Deneroff
John R. Dilworth
Frankie Kowalski
Donna La Brecque
William Mortiz
Mark Segall
Gene Walz

Le WEBMASTER
Guillaume Calop

DESIGN/LAYOUT :
IMP Graphic
e-mail : imp_ecmp@club-internet.fr
Christa Theoharous

ADVERTISING SALES
North America : Wendy Jackson
Europe : Vincent Ferri
Asia : Bruce Teitelbaum
UK: Roger Watkins

For those who still associate the beginnings of feature animation with Disney's Snow White, it is a useful reminder of the richness and sophistication animation could and did achieve in its early years.

Gene Walz, in "Cabin-Fever Animation," provides the first of what will be an ongoing series of regional roundups, focusing this time on Winnipeg. The city has emerged as a center of innovative filmmaking far from the beaten track, Walz reports on Cordell Barker's foray into CGI, as well as other local talent. Meanwhile, Donna La Breque, in "The Trance Experience of Zork Nemesis," examines the role played by animation in the latest update to the Zork computer game phenomena.

This issue ends with John Dilworth's review of Mamoru Oshii's cybertech thriller, Ghost in the Shell, while Frankie Kowalski offers up some Desert Island picks from a variety of independent filmmakers who, at one time or another, have indulged their fantasies about making animated features.

An Invitation

I suppose this is in the way of a help wanted ad, which I guess is nothing to be ashamed of. So, here it goes -- Animation World Magazine is looking for writers and artists who would like to contribute articles, film/TV/interactive/book reviews or news items, as well as cartoons or comic strips.

Although I sometimes have delusions of being a world renown expert in animation, there is no way that either me or my Associate Editor, Frankie Kowalski, can be aware of all that is going on in today's rapidly expanding animation universe. For instance, as of this writing, Animation World Magazine has been "visited" by readers from at least 52 countries, and the number is constantly growing!

So, I extend my invitation to please email me with your ideas and/or request a list of our requirements and what we pay. (It's not much, but we do pay contributors.) Although English is our main language, we will accept submissions in other languages; in such instances, we will probably publish the piece in both the original language and in English. (However, it does speed things along if you submit queries in English or French.) Thank you.

— Harvey Deneroff
(editor@awn.com)

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Plympton's Metamorphoses

by Mark Segall

At first glance, you wouldn't peg lanky, laconic Bill Plympton as the kind of guy who likes to electrocute people. Or squash them, burn them, and blow them up. But don't let that innocent, boy-next-door look fool you. When it comes to cartoon violence, Bill is an innovator on a par with Tex Avery and Bob Clampett. His characters swallow and inhale each other, and like to bite one another's heads off one chomp at a time.

Plympton is currently working full-tilt on his new animated feature, *I Married A Strange Person*, which should be finished in December. He describes it as "*Akira* meets *Pulp Fiction.*" Judging from the 300 individual sketches push-pinned to the studio wall—the working storyboard for *Strange Person*—this comedy/thriller will be full of the kind of transformations that have become a Plympton trademark: men turning into lizards, characters tearing themselves to pieces, lawns refusing to be mowed.

Features are supposed to be turned out by big studios, using an army of animators and inbetweeners, not one guy with a little help from his friends. Bill's first feature, *The Tune*, was something of an independent animation milestone: a 90 minute film animated by one man. Ten colorists are helping on *Strange Person*, but once again all the animation will come from his hand.

While prolific draftsmen animating single-handedly isn't unknown, it's still pretty rare. Animation pioneer Winsor McCay worked that way on such films as *Gertie the Dinosaur*, before the advent of the studio system. Modern independent animators like Plympton's mentor George Griffin work alone. Animating a feature was a pretty daunting task for the husband-and-wife team of Paul and Sandra Fierlinger, whose hour-long *Drawn from Memory* was released last fall. For someone working alone

I Married A Strange Person
© Bill Plympton

Storyboard sketch: Bugs and the mother-in-law in *I Married A Strange Person*
© Bill Plympton

it must be a doubly hard task to undertake.

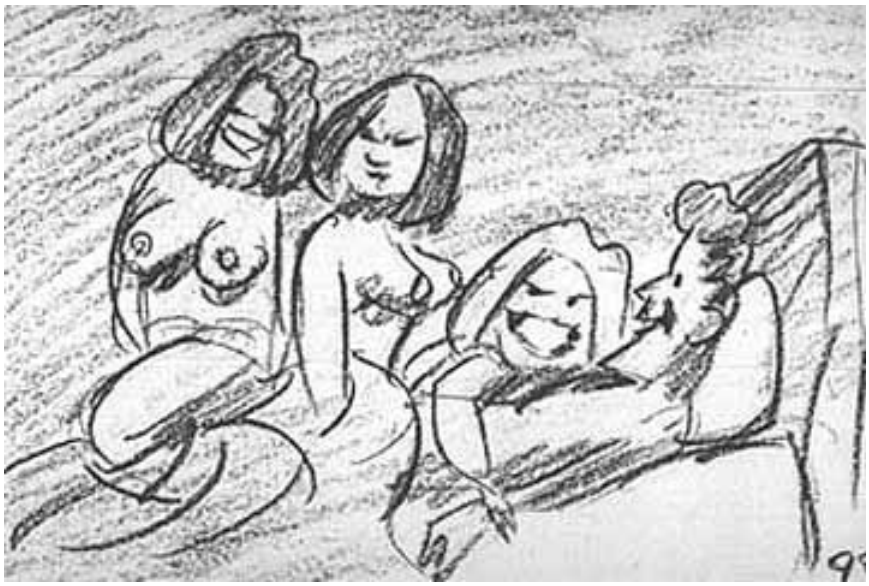
Joking, Dreaming, or Drunk?

In 1990, Matt Groening and MTV's John Payson and Abby Terkuhle ran into Plympton at a party. When he announced that he was making a feature, and that he would be animating the whole thing himself and financing it out of his own pocket, they thought he was joking. Or dreaming. Or drunk. They were wrong to doubt him. Bill completed *The Tune,* his film about an aspiring songwriter, on schedule and within budget, in 1992.

How does he do it? First, he draws fast. Plympton's style, going back to his days as a political cartoonist for New York's *Soho Weekly News* in the 70s, is loose and squiggly. Second, he puts in long hours. "My social life does sorta get sacrificed to my animation habit," he admits. He rises daily at 6:30 a.m., goes straight to his animation table, and works for 10 to 16 hours. He does not generally take weekends and holidays off. Third, it's not his style to use a lot of inbetweens; he often works on threes and fours, meaning he keeps the same drawing on screen for a sixth of a second instead of a twelfth or a twenty-fourth.

Animation on *The Tune* was a three-step process. Plympton animated scenes on paper. Assistants cut the characters out with X-acto knives and then mounted them on cels. Plympton then re-penciled, adding shadows, detail and color. Animation on *Strange Person* is a more traditional, two-step process. Pencil drawings are xeroxed onto cels and painted on the back ("opaqued," in animation parlance). "It's quicker this way," he says, "and I like the look."

It's a lot of hard work to animate, finance and promote these films himself, but Plympton wouldn't have it any other way; it gives him the artistic freedom and the independence he wants and needs. Starting with *Strange Person*, he'll even be handling his own distribution. To give himself more visibility, he's also



Storyboard sketch,*I Married A Strange Person*
© Bill Plympton

launched a web site. "Actually, New York University initially contacted us about being part of their site," says Plympton's assistant John Holderried. "Mike Dougherty, a student in NYU's graduate animation program did the HTML and worked with Bill on the layout and the links. It was fun to put it together, to look for other related sites. I was surprised how much Plympton material was already on the web."

His characters swallow and inhale each other, and like to bite one another's heads off one chomp at a time.

Plympton's financing is ingenious, and extremely well thought out. His master plan for funding *The Tune* is a case in point. He made some money from his string of successful, award-winning shorts (*How to Kiss, One of Those Days, 25 Ways to Quit Smoking, Plymptoons*) and from animating commercials, but still didn't have enough to make a feature. He then decided to complete segments of the film, submit them to festivals, market them as shorts, and plow the profits back into the feature. This accounts for *The Tune's* episodic structure, as different parts needed to stand alone.

There's more money available for the new feature, so it contains only one segment originally released as a short, *How to Make Love to a Woman.* It appears in the film as an instructional film that one of the characters is watching. *Strange Person* is more story driven, though like most Plympton projects, difficult to summarize, but here goes:

When newlywed Grant Boyer is zapped by strange radiation from a TV satellite dish, he grows an extra brain lobe capable of making his fantasies real. Grant turns his wife Kerry into several different women during sex. He makes bugs come streaming out of his mother-in-law's mouth. A demonstration of his abilities on a TV talk show attracts the unwanted attentions of a megalomaniac media maven, a washed-up comedian, and a power-mad Colonel. To stay alive and out of their clutches, Grant will need all the help he can get, including that of his somewhat bewildered bride. Will she stick with him, for better or for worse, even though he's become... a strange person?

A Full Head of Hair

It's hard to get personal details out of Plympton; he'd rather talk about his work. Peter Vey, who collaborated on the script of *Strange Person,* proved equally close-mouthed. When I asked him, "What do you know about Bill?" he told me, "He's tall and he has a full head of hair. He always likes to wear shorts."

Musical collaborator Maureen McElheron, who played with Bill years ago in a country band, was more forthcoming. "Bill's funny," she says. "He comes off so deadpan and normal and understated. Not a big talker. But he has that component that all geniuses have, complete focus, singleness of purpose." Bill is very supportive of others, she points out, and the same people collaborate with him again and again. She's very appreciative of the help he gave in promoting her soundtrack for *The Tune*, making sure it got displayed in record stores.

In fact, for someone who puts in such long stints alone at the drawing board, Bill manages to maintain a remarkably large and loyal circle of friends, which includes Matt Groening, cartoonist John Callahan, filmmaker Gus Van Zandt and Portland animators Joanna Priestley, Will Vinton, Jim Brashfield and Joan Gratz. Bill grew up in Oregon City, Oregon, by the Clackamas River; his parents still live there and he keeps in touch with many childhood friends. He goes back there every year without fail to throw a barbecue beside a mud

Storyboard sketch: Our hero before he gets "zapped" in *I Married A Strange Person*
© Bill Plympton

lake that has formed on the Clackamas. What happens at this annual "Mud Party"? "One hundred fifty people get stoned, take their clothes off and wallow in the mud," says Bill. "It's like warm chocolate pudding." When fellow Clackamas County native Tonya Harding made headlines the other year, Plympton added another party in her "honor."

Soiled Underwear

What else does Bill Plympton do when he's not animating? Well, for one thing he turns out live-action films. The first was 1994's *J. Lyle*, a comedy about a greedy landlord. Currently touring the festival circuit is *Guns on the Clackamas.* A fake documentary, à la *Spinal Tap,* it details the calamities that befall makers of a big-time western after key financing pulls out. Production economies lead to food poisoning and electrocution; frugality necessitates shooting key scenes with dead actors; new money is raised by selling the stars' soiled underwear.

So, how does a kid from Clackamas County end up in the cartoon business? Ever since he first saw Daffy Duck, Bill wanted to make cartoons; but it wasn't until after working on the short *Boomtown* with Jules Feiffer in 1985 that he had the opportunity. "It was the time of all the independents—Spike Lee, Jim Jarmusch— that inspired me." In 1987, he garnered an Academy Award nomination for the musical short *Your Face.* In it, the singer's head goes through myriad transformations—imploding, exploding, melting and breaking out in dozens of miniature faces.

One hundred fifty people get stoned, take their clothes off and wallow in the mud.

"It was a cheapo, throwaway experimental film, I thought. This'll weird a lot of people out; they won't get it, but they did."

They didn't just get it, they loved it. *Your Face* established Plympton's reputation as a leading independent animator. Only three years later, he was turning down a million dollar contract from Disney.

The outrageous work of Bill Plympton
© Bill Plympton

"They wanted me to work on the genie in Aladdin—on all that crazy metamorphosis, fast humor they're not really great at." At 21 he would have jumped at the chance, but at 44 it would have been a step backwards. He was already making a living off of his own wacky ideas without having to tailor them to some corporate board of directors. "Disney contracts are so complete," Bill points out, "that legally, any doodles you do, any jokes you tell, and any dreams you have during that 36 month period, they own." Friends told him that, "When you negotiate with Disney, it's not good-cop/bad-cop, it's bad-cop/-antichrist".

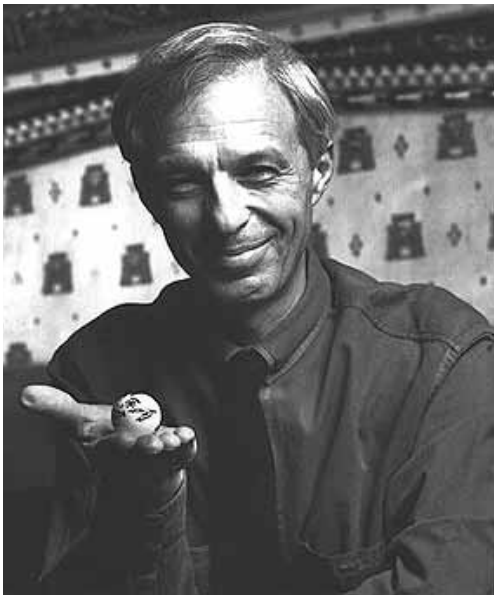
He passed on their offer in order to devote his time to *The Tune.* The irony is that Plympton did once offer Disney his services—in 1958, at age 12. A big fan of *Song of the South* and *Peter Pan,* he sent them his drawings with a note emphasizing his eagerness to lend a hand on their next big feature, *Sleeping Beauty.*

They turned him down flat. Some nonsense about his being too short, or child labor laws, or something like that. It's tantalizing to imagine how animation history might have been changed had they accepted. There might now be a film where Sleeping Beauty rises from her long sleep, gazes deep into the Prince's eyes and then suddenly—bites his head off.

A self-described red diaper baby, Mark Segall has won awards for labor journalism and public service copywriting. He co-authored How To Make Love To Your Money- *(Delacorte,1982) with his wife, Margaret Tobin. This fall, he will become Editor of ASIFA-East's* aNYmator *newsletter, which he currently designs and is a regular contributor.*

Transfixed and Goggle-Eyed

By R.O. Blechman



R. O. Blechman
© R. O. Blechman

It seemed too special to miss. The 1991 New York Film Festival was offering a sneak preview of Disney's latest film, Beauty and the Beast, presented as a work-in-progress with pencil test segments interspersed with final footage. Despite ambivalent feelings about Disney (I admired Pinocchio; I hated Cinderella), I had to go.

The theater was packed, and no wonder! Aside from the draw that any Disney animation had, there was the special attraction of seeing the inner workings of a Disney feature—the boney armature as well as the flesh and blood of the film.

Fifteen minutes into the film I felt an irresistible urge to turn from the screen towards the audience. I already had a strong reaction to the film and was curious what other people felt. I turned around. The audience was goggle-eyed. I was no less transfixed, but for a different reason. Here was a cross section of film-lovers—this was The New York Film Festival, after all—clearly loving a film with formulaic artwork, a banal story, and cliché personae. Did these Frenchmen ever inhabit anything resembling a real France? The village these folk inhabited was straight out of a theme park. The stereotypical heroine, Belle, with her enormous sunny side-up eyes, seemed to resemble nothing so much as a Keane painting (remember that Fifties artist—the butt of Woody Allen's Sleeper—who painted outsize eyes on street waifs? Well here he was, alive again, and on a big screen). Belle exclaims at one point, clutching a book to her bosom (heaving on ones), "I just finished the most wonderful story!" The wonderful story turns out to be... Jack and the Beanstalk! This is literature? This is a role model for children?

But there were more basic problems with the film. The visuals were often dogged with a literalism of the sky-equals-blue, grass-equals-green variety, which is the very antithesis of art. Art is stylization if nothing else, and there was precious little of it in what I saw.

I got up from my seat and walked stiffly toward the exit, hoping that people would think I was headed for the Men's Room.

I got up from my seat, standing alone in that vast theater, and walked stiffly toward the exit, hoping that people would think I was headed for the Men's Room. But I doubt if anybody in that rapt audience noticed.

R.O. Blechman's *L'Histoire duSoldat (The Soldier's Tale)*
© R. O. Blechman

Back to the Forties

Home again, my time clock shifted back to the Forties when I was a young art student in Manhattan. In those days the creative Scylla and Charybides were two artists to be steered well clear of: Norman Rockwell (although I've since come to admire his painterly technique, something not apparent on the printed page) and Walt Disney. Disney himself was aware of his waning hold on the American public.

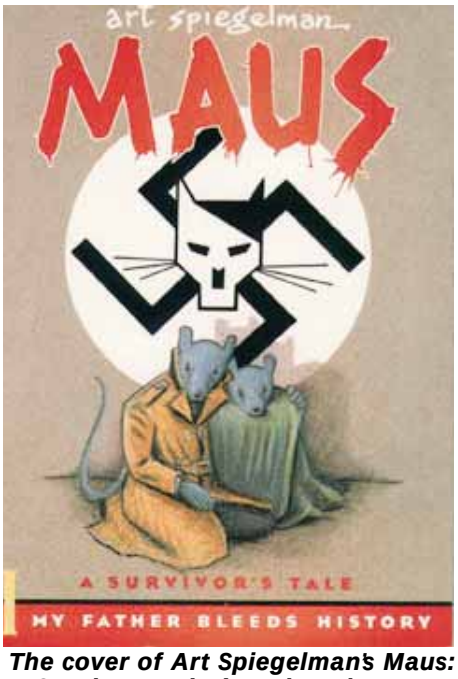
The Disney studio had been eclipsed by the popularity of an upstart bicoastal studio, UPA, which pioneered a highly graphic approach to animation design. The new studio was producing an often brilliant group of shorts using such talents as Ludwig Bemelman's in the faithfully visualized retelling of his classic children's book, Madeline, and James Thurber in his masterful Unicorn

in the Garden (which I saw, incidentally, as a soldier, billed as *The Uniform in the Garden*). Rankled by the critical and popular success of these films, Disney came out with his own stylized short,

Belle, with her enormous sunny side-up eyes, seemed to resemble nothing so much as a Keane painting.

Toot, Whistle, Plunk, and Boom. If animation is the sincerest form of flattery, it is also the surest sign of artistic bankruptcy.

So what has happened in these intervening years? Why would a look considered so bankrupt in one decade be so bankable in another? Why has the taste of the American public shifted so radically—and the taste of the media critics, those presumed watchdogs of the national taste? Something profound, I suspect, and something frightening. Something that goes



The cover of Art Spiegelman's Maus: A Survivor's Tale (Pantheon).
© Art Spiegelman

beyond mere aesthetics (although there is nothing "mere" about aesthetics. It is the barometer of a civilization.) It touches on no less than the American psy-

Beauty and the Beast
© Walt Disney Pictures

che.

I suspect that this decline of visual standards—this willingness to accept kitsch, and worse, this inability to recognize it—has something to do with a galloping infantilism, a product of lessening educational and loosening media standards, perhaps fed, literally, by the junk food we consume. "We are what we eat,"goes the old adage, and it may not be far afield of the truth. Whatever the precise reasons for this decline, Disney is enjoying an unparalleled success.

A mere waif at the turn of the century, the bitch goddess Success has become a reigning queen. And success has triumphed over the more solid virtue of achievement. This was brought home to me recently when I attended the National Magazine Awards luncheon. Inducted into the "Hall of Fame" by the Association was that cover-to-cover gossip magazine, *People*. I couldn't help thinking that in a world threatened by various apocalypses—nuclear and environmental—how could something as trivial and, worse!, diverting—be honored? Well, what was being honored was its circulation success, not its editorial achievement. What, may I ask, had *People* done to uplift our culturally impoverished (and financially impoverished—and perhaps the two are related) society? Nada. Zilch. Now back to Disney.

A Cachet to Die For

I believe that the sea change in Walt Disney's popularity has a lot to do with the massive publicity machine spearheaded by that mother of all cocktail table books, the gorgeously written and produced Abrams volume, *The Art of Walt Disney.* Here was an imprimatur and cachet to die for, and it gave Disney a foothold in the American psyche that has become a stranglehold on independent animated filmmaking—at least in the theatrical area.

Name a breakthrough in animated theatricals in the past 10

In the world of theatrical features, what is there but Disney and Disney Redux .

or 20 years? None that I've seen—none, at least comparable to those in the field of publishing such as *Maus,* or comic strip artists such as Joost Swarte, Charles Burns, Kaz or Mazzucchelli. In the world of theatrical features, what is there but Disney and Disney Redux, or else things pretested and pretasted in the animated kitschens of television?

Of course there are admirable types such as Bill Plympton who dare the impossible and work

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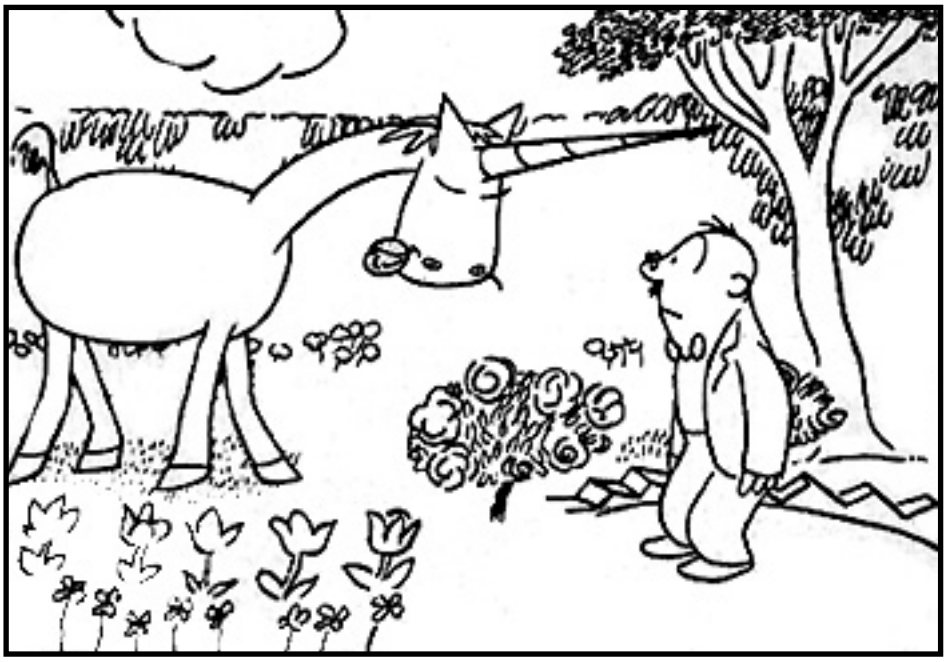


***The Unicorn and The Garden*, Bill Hurtz, 1953**
© UPA

Why would a look considered so bankrupt in one decade be so bankable in another?

with 11 fingers on 25 hour days to produce their own features. But for filmmakers with only 10 digits and 24 hour days, or families to support, or studios to manage, there is little hope.

But Leonard Bernstein maintained that hope is a sixth (or is it fifth? I can't remember which) instinct. So there is always the hope that the telephone will ring—the fax machine will buzz—and there will be an offer from Pie in the Sky Productions, "Mr. Brilliant Filmmaker. We read your latest proposal (or read your latest book)"—either fantasy will do—"It would make a great feature..."

R.O. Blechman pursues a dual career as an illustrator and as head of his own animation studio, The Ink Tank, in New York. Starting this fall, Stewart, Tabori & Chang will be publishing three of his books: The Life of Saint Nicholas, *a reissue of* The Juggler of Our Lady, *and a contemporary retelling of* The Book of Jonah.

***Madeline*, Bob Cannon, 1952**
© UPA

SHIFTINGS REALITIES

Between Live Action and Animation

By Suzanne Buchan

The Brothers Quay are among the most accomplished animation artists to emerge in recent years. Their fantastic decor and Kafkaesque puppets, attention to the liberation of the mistake and their casual and lingering closeups combine in an ingenious alchemy of unconscious, metaphoric vision. Watching any of their animated films means entering a dream world of metaphor and visual poetry. In their own words: "Puppet films by their very nature are extremely artificial constructions, even more so depending at what level of 'enchantment' one would wish for them in relation to the subject, and, above all, the conceptual mise-en-scène applied." The enchantment of the Quays' films has won them audiences throughout the world, and their innovations have introduced a new quality of poetry to animated film.

***The Institute Benjamenta*, 1995**
© Zeitgeist Films

A terrifying sense of the sublime simultaneously haunts and mystifies the Institute and its inhabitants.

Stephen and Timothy Quay were born near Philadelphia in 1947. After studies at the Philadelphia College of Art, they moved to London and attended the Royal College of Art, where they made their first puppet films. After the release of prize-winning Nocturnia Artificialia in 1980, they founded Koninck Studios in London together with Keith Griffins, whom they had met at the Royal College of Art.

Trained as illustrators, their films give greater attention to mise-en-scène and the marginal, and are more associative than narrative: "We demand that the decor act as poetic vessels and be foregrounded as much as the puppets themselves. In fact, we ask of our machines and objects to act as much if not more than the puppets … as for what is called the scenario: at most we have only a limited musical sense of its trajectory, and we tend to be permanently open to vast uncertainties, mistakes, disorientations (as though lying in wait to trap the slightest fugitive encounter)."

In addition to puppet films, the work of the Brothers Quay encompasses various animated shorts and advertising commissions (including documentaries on Punch and Judy, Stravinsky, Janácek and the art of Anamorphosis "De Artificiali Perspectiva," and station/network I.D.'s (Channel 4, MTV). They have designed theater and opera productions (Mazeppa, A Flea in Her Ear, The Love of Three Oranges) for various European venues and have made music videos, including collaborating on Peter Gabriel's Sledgehammer, and promos for Michael Penn and His Name is Alive.

Locus of Literary and Poetic Fagments

Their films reveal the influence of Eastern European culture: whether inspired by animators, composers, or writers, a middle European esthetic seems to have beckoned them into a mysterious locus of literary and poetic fragments, wisps of music, the play of light and morbid textures. Certain films can be considered homages to filmmakers whose work they admire (The Cabinet of Jan Svankmajer), others present their own intuitive and visionary encounters with authors, artists and composers whose writings and compositions are transformed into the cinematic medium: Street of Crocodiles, is loosely based on Bruno Schulz's short story, "Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies," and was inspired by a print by Fragonard. The observed incorporation of other media, which brought the Quays from 2D illustration to animation, continues in their most recent film: The Institute Benjamenta, their first full-length live-action film completed last year. The film has received awards at numerous festivals and has just been released in the US. The illustrious mastery achieved in their exquisite and uncanny animated films is continued in this film's decor, labyrinthian narrative and esthetic composition within the frame.

We ask of our machines and objects to act as much if not more than the puppets.

The Quay Brothers and Nick Knowland on the set of *The Institute Benjamenta*
© Zeitgeist Films

The Institute Benjamenta was shot in black and white, enabling the subtlety of chiaroscuro, an animated choreography of light and stark graphics to disorient, capture and enchant audiences. The few animated scenes within the film are isolated interludes, expressions of subjective vision and poetic metaphor. They contribute to the dreamlike quality of a film which is uncannily freed of laws of time and space. This and future live-action projects are by no means an indication of a move away from animation: the Brothers Quay intend to explore the po-tential which slumbers in the combination of these cinematic techniques. The formal possibilities inherent in animation are essential to the dream, inner vision and narrative meandering so essential to their cinematic transformations of text, poetry and imagination.

A Dreamlike Voyage

Carl Orff's music and a spoken riddle are the aural foreshadowing which accompany the film's exquisite, stylized opening credits. At dusk, a small man approaches a door, pulls at his heavily starched, blindingly white collar and hesitantly knocks. Jakob von Gunten (Mark Rylance), a thirtyish, delicate man who "wants to be of use to someone in this life" enters the Institute Benjamenta, a school for domestics, and embarks on a dreamlike voyage through an eerie, metaphysical fairy tale world.

Assisted by her devoted and enigmatic model student Kraus (Daniel Smith), doe-eyed Fraulein Lisa Benjamenta (Alice Kriege) runs the institute with her brother Herr Benjamenta (Gottfried John), guiding her students through a lesson which is always the same, "Practice-scenes-from-life"; mechanical repetition, self-castigation, monotony and submission. It is a curriculum of cryptic signs, absurd gestures and unbearable detail. Jakob's arrival awakes in Herr Benjamenta a haunting hope of a Savior, with discrete homoerotic undertones.

The fragmented, dark and obscure relationship between brother and sister and Kraus climaxes in Lisa's decision to stop living; she is "dying from those who could have seen and held me ... dying from the emptiness of cautious and clever people."

***The Institute Benjamenta*, 1995**
© Zeitgeist Films

Jakob stirs Lisa from a loveless existence, causing a horrific recognition of something unspeakable which gnaws at her until she can no longer bear it. After a confession to Jakob sealed with a fleeting brush of her lips on his, she expires. On her bier, like Snow White mourned by her dwarfs, her brother bent over her in grief, Lisa's eyes open and sparkle darkly into the camera. Jakob and Herr Benjamenta leave the Institute, but Kraus remains behind. Guardian of the fish bowl, the riddle and the sleeping beauty, Kraus is the constancy who seems to guarantee that rituals and fossils like the Institute will never fully expire.

A poetry of shadowy encounters and almost conspiratorial secretiveness.

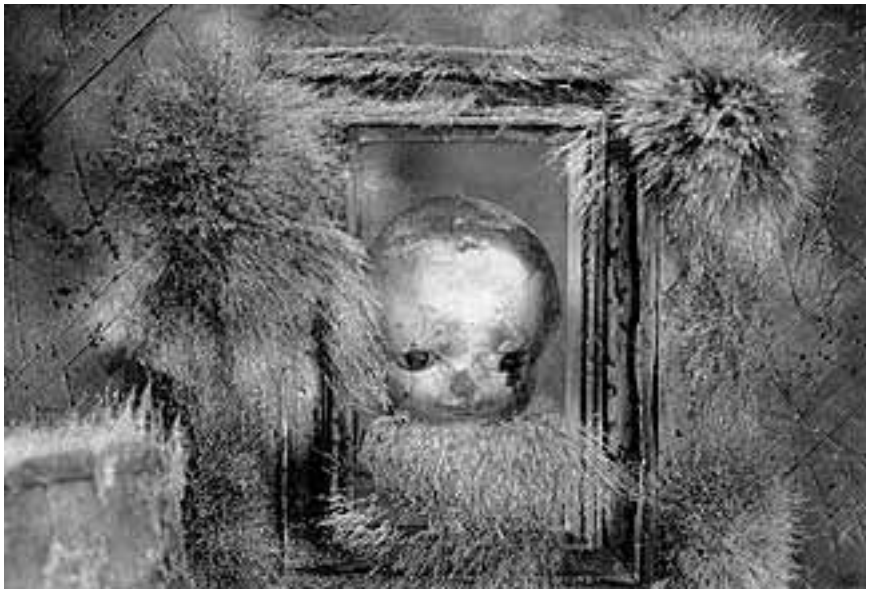
A terrifying sense of the sublime simultaneously haunts and mystifies the Institute and its inhabitants. In isolation, the film's visual leitmotifs and iconography are exquisite: totemistic cloven hoofs, deer antlers, flowing waters; in their sublimation and appropriation in a world of suppressed Victorian eroticism, they become obsessive, dark and ambiguous. School mistress Lisa Benjamenta's cane, with which she guides and masters her students, is tipped with a tiny hoof (initially the Quays thought to give her cloven shoes); Herr Benjamenta's foot is seen hoofed, and in a disturbing moment we see him rutting in front of a steam-streaked mirror, a majestic set of antlers in his arms.

A stunning use of light gives the film its ethereal quality. Short animated sequences punctuate the film and complete the fairy tale environment, suspending time; they are minute and discrete visualizations, reminders of a metaphysical life which slumbers in the Institute.

Through the Roof

Whether working in animation or live-action, the Quays choose to use what they call a lateral hierarchy of cinematic formal aspects; unlike conventional films, in which the hierarchy is vertical, topped by a script and narrative, the Quays cast the Institute before the actors. "We wanted the film to move more in the direction of the fable or the fairy tale (or at least a notion of it), as Walser did obliquely. He didn't walk in

***Street of Crocodiles*, 1986**
Courtesy of Suzanne Buchan



***Stille Nacht* (Silent Night)**
Courtesy of Suzanne Buchan

the front door, he came through the roof, so to speak. Thus, in order to, score something of, as Walser called it, the 'senseless but all the same meaningful 'fairy tale," we started by casting the decor as the main actor. We felt that the essential 'mysterium' of the film should be the institute itself, as though it had its own inner life and former existence which seemed to dream upon its inhabitants, and exert its own conspiratorial spell and undertows. That time and space should be ambiguous, that the locale of the film would be less geographical than spiritual, all to score that particularly Walserian half-waking, half-sleeping 'world in between.' And, since we've always maintained a belief in the illogical, the irrational ... and the obliqueness of poetry, we don't think exclusively in terms of narrative, but also the 'parenthesis' that lay hidden behind the narrative." A gesture to their loyalty to puppet film aesthetics, the Quays' remarked that they "treated the actors with as much respect as we treated our puppets." They are currently working on a new live-action feature project, which will once again incorporate animated sequences, further exploring the melange of these two techniques.

Enabling an animated choreography of light and stark graphics to disorient, capture and enchant.

In scenes of elusive cinematic and literary reference which identify the Quays' films, one is obliquely reminded of silent filmmakers Kirsanov, Murnau, the surrealist Buñuel and the Russian film poet Tarkowsky; of Kafka (who was greatly influenced by Walser) and of essential myth and fairy tale. Continuing collaboration with the Polish composer Leszek Jankowski supports and counterpoints their careful visual choreography, whether of puppets, exquisite objects or actors. Like Lisa Benjamenta, the images are simultaneously fragile and immortal. The films evade a postmodern context or interpretation, and their epiphanic moments and dreamscapes provide a momentary orientation, but are themselves even greater enigmas within the film's poetic fabric.

Seen as a whole, the Brothers Quay's works are independent of any definable genre; indeed, the imitation of their unique style which can be observed in films of other animators are a complimentary gesture to the auteur style they have developed. Throughout their opus, a continuity can be observed Quays' devotion to the marginal, the nobody and the unnoticed, elevated into the sublime.

Their films are unbound by time, preferring to investigate what they call "a poetry of shadowy encounters and almost conspiratorial secretiveness." Whether commissioned or independently produced by longtime collaborator Keith Griffiths, Institute Benjamenta retains the unique signature which informs their work. "We like going for long walks, metaphorically, into whatever country we go to—we could disappear in any country." For the Quays, the realm of animation remains a favored locus of future cinematic sojourn.

Suzanne H. Buchan is a Teaching and Research Assistant at the Film Studies Department at the University of Zurich. Co-founder and Co-Director of the Fantoche International Animation Film Festival Baden/Switzerland, she is currently preparing a dissertation on animation.

Instinctive Decisions—Dave Borthwick, Radical Independent

*"**Independent:** Free from influence, guidance, or control of another or others; self reliant: an independent mind." —The American Heritage Dictionary*

By Frankie Kowalski

Dave Borthwick
© bolexbrothers

Working as an independent filmmaker is not a "stand still" kind of thing for Dave Borthwick and his colleagues at bolexbrothers studios, in Bristol, England. The studio currently turns out commercials for such clients as Coca-Cola's Fanta, Legos and Weetabix to fund his love of "dynamic filmmaking." In fact, Borthwick limits the amount of work he takes on, so the studio can devote more time to making experimental shorts. Recently, the studio has turned out such films as Darren Walsh's The Biz and Mike Booth's The Saint Inspector—both made by first-time directors. This is in addition to its first feature effort, Borthwick's The Secret Adventures of Tom Thumb (1993).

Officially founded by Borthwick and Dave Riddett (now at Aardman Animations) in 1991, bolexbrothers is part of Bristol's thriving animation community. He recalls that the impetus to establish their current facility came when, "We were faced with a project (i.e, The Secret Adventures) that was going to take one-and-a-half years to film, meaning we had to set up and equip our own studio. So, the film's completion left us with a full studio facility. Keeping that going had been relatively easy so far, because (to our surprise) we found ourselves being offered commercials on the back of the film."

Working as an independent filmmaker is not a "stand still" kind of thing.

In retrospect, Borthwick says that the process that led him into animation began in the late 60s and early 70s, when he was mainly working in "theater-based projects." This involved designing and producing projected special FX, backgrounds and lighting for "traveling performances."

Visually Narrative Ideas

"As I'd had little or no experience of working with film," he recalls, "all the material was 'stills based,' [which involved] using a variety of still projectors to produce the movement and animation that was needed (any light show veteran will know what I mean). That was a very formative period for me. Not only in discovering ways of teasing movement out of still images, but also in working with visually narrative ideas."

The theater group he was working with never bothered rehearsing their shows and the first time anyone saw the "whole picture" was on opening night. Working under these conditions may seem somewhat courageous, yet the experience seemed to generate excitement and wonder to the audience. He fondly remembers that, "What it taught me was that it can pay dividends if you learn to trust your instincts, especially when making creative solutions about narrative."

Borthwick still feels that the theater is "the perfect vehicle for audience engagement." However, despite the excitement he experienced in seeing a different show every night, Borthwick envied people who could "carry it around in a film can."

After learning the fundamentals of filmmaking at Bristol University, he wanted to be an animator; instead, he spent the next 10 years or so as cameraman, indulging his passion for lighting and composition. Borthwick was fascinated by the whole filmmaking process and wanted to be more involved.

By the early 1980s, Borthwick was living in Copenhagen, but frequently returning to England to work for the BBC. A turning point was an assignment to produce a series of "cheap" shorts set against the soundtracks of vintage pop records. The job required the juggling of very small budgets in order to pay for the actors required for particular films, leaving only "a few hundred pounds in the kitty. So, together with Dave Riddett," he explained, "I decided to produce them as animation films. All they required was our time and imagination. We couldn't afford to commission armatured models, so we plundered local rubbish dumps and the toy cupboards of friends' children."

The Secret Adventures of Tom Thumb
© Manga Entertainment

I enjoy working with kindred spirits who appreciate instinctive decisions.

The Ultimate Ready Made

It was during this period, in search of "ready mades," that Borthwick started working with the ultimate ready made, the human body, using pixilation. He wanted to try and work with the technique in a very controlled way; his aim was to create characters with more subtle facial and body expressions to provide for a more dramatic effect; in this, he seems to have wanted to deliberately avoid the more comic, slapstick effects achieved with the method by the past master of this technique, Norman McLaren.

The opportunity to put pixilation to the test came out of the blue, with a chance commission from BBC Bristol to make a 10 minute animated pilot. Several ideas were discussed, but he eventually settled on the idea of reworking some traditional fairy tales. He wanted to try to transpose them from the "sterile never-never land, to which time has relegated them," into a world that would seem less removed and more accessible, and "which had the ability to engage an adult audience."

Borthwick was thrilled with the idea, because animation is a means by which he could totally immerse himself in his own fantasy world. "I wanted to work with actors and models. A story involving giants and little folk seemed the obvious subject and Tom Thumb offered some salient issues that appealed to my more sinister curiosities."

Although the BBC encouraged Borthwick to be radical, even provoking, their initial reaction to the script was "pretty negative." He commented that, "I think they felt it was offensive. But I was very excited at its potential and insisted that I wasn't interested in producing any other ideas that had been suggested." The BBC changed their minds and Borthwick got the go ahead. "Then the commissioning editor went to the programmers with a bunch of new programs," he recalls, "including a couple of

action in it. I have a bit of a problem mixing live-action with animation. Once you've set up an animated world. live-action, for me, just shatters the illusion and drags one back to normality."

The Secret Adventures of Tom Thumb is a bold approach to the story's basic theme and a visually striking journey through a bizarre and often surrealistic post-industrial world of "giants" and "little folk." One can only marvel what sort of world Borthwick's next feature venture will evoke.

Frankie Kowalski is Associate Editor of Animation World Magazine.

Don Bluth Goes Independent

by Jerry Beck

A personal remembrance of when Don Bluth quit Disney, formed an independent studio and inspired the current feature animation boom.

Don Bluth, Gary Goldman and John Pomeroy
Courtesy of Jerry Beck

The 1970s was a decade in which TV animation plunged to its depths, with the likes of Hanna-Barbera and Filmation dominating Saturday mornings with the worst of their wares. Although Hollywood was barely interested in animated film, the period began with considerable promise, with such independent films as Ralph Bakshi's *Fritz the Cat* and *Heavy Traffic,* John Wilson's *Shinbone Alley* and René Laloux' *Fantastic Planet.* But as the decade progressed, Disney sunk to an all-time low with the release of *Robin Hood,* and ambitious attempts like Richard Williams' *Raggedy Ann and Andy,* Murukami-Wolf-Swenson's *Mouse and His Child* and Sanrio's *Winds of Change* proved to be bitter disappointments.

Bluth's dream was to return the art of animation to its glorious Golden Age.

I graduated from high school in 1974 and planned a career as a cartoonist and animator. But things were so bad in those days that I grew frustrated with animation and pursued research into its wonderful past.

All was not lost. Disney's *The Rescuers* showed the possibilities offered by a new team of young animators; this, along with early artwork released on *The Fox and the Hound* offered some hope. Then came a story in *The New York Times* about a defection at Disney's.

Quitting in the Name of Disney

Directing animator Don Bluth and two colleagues, Gary Goldman and John Pomeroy, three of the most talented of the young Turks at Disney (publicized heavily in the promotion of *The Rescuers*) had defiantly quit. They left because of what they felt was a lack of regard by their superiors about the quality of the artwork, a deteriorating production process, and management's declining respect for the artists who built the studio. They quit in the name of Walt Disney, whom the three felt would never tolerate the way the current regime had let the animation department fall to such a low level.

The next day, 11 other animators quit to join Bluth and company. It was a bold move and it shook up Disney's animation department; finding capable Disney-trained character animators to replace these renegades wasn't easy. And it would cause a major delay in the release of *The Fox and the Hound* .

Bluth established his own studio, with the backing of Aurora Productions, a company headed by a group of ex-Disney executives, and started production on a feature, *The Secret of NIMH.*

Don Bluth's *Banjo The Woodpile Cat*
Courtesy of Jerry Beck

While at Disney, Bluth led a group of animators to work after

hours on a Disneyesque half hour short, *Banjo the Woodpile Cat.* It was done to learn the entire process of making a film, not just the character animation they were toiling on during the day. *Banjo* also taught them tricks and techniques they could use on their features. The art direction and special effects were in the classic Disney and Hollywood cartoon traditions, techniques and styles no longer being practiced anywhere in animation at that time.

When Disney management failed to take interest in this out-of-pocket, home made short, Bluth then used *Banjo* as a way to lure investors in his dream: to

The Secret of NIMH
Courtesy of Jerry Beck

return the art of animation to its glorious Golden Age. With an offer from Aurora to challenge Disney, Bluth and his team made their bold move.

Bored to Tears, Then ...

Early in 1980, I was working in New York for United Artists as a salesman in their 16mm department, renting films to colleges and hospitals. One night, word spread in the local animation community that a representative of Bluth's new renegade studio (Executive Producer Mel Griffin) was going to give a presentation at the School Of Visual Arts. This turned out to be, perhaps, the first studio recruitment pitch open to the public. The studio rep, a business partner installed at Bluth by Aurora, began to talk of the studio's dream to return animation to it's glorious past. I remember that many animation students there were bored to tears at his speech and were there just because they were required to attend. Then he showed a clip from *NIMH.*

I'll never forget it. It was the sequence of Mrs. Brisby and Jeremy the crow (voiced by Don DeLuise) flying to the tree where the Great Owl (John Carradine) was. The entire sequence—with the cobwebs, the darkness, the great voice acting, the owl crushing a spider and eating a moth—was the greatest thing I had ever seen! It looked like Disney animation from the forties, only darker. It was as lavish as anything from *Bambi* or *Fantasia,* only slightly subversive (skeletal remains of other animals the owl must have eaten, littered the background; the owl taking a chomp at a Disneyesque moth). The students (myself included) *begged* the man to run this footage again. Everyone was charged and excited. It wasn't just talk—Bluth was going to do it!

I had that sequence running in my mind for weeks. I had seen the future of animation and it's name was Don Bluth Productions. (It was a high that was only

A scene from *Xanadu*
Courtesy of Jerry Beck

topped in later years, when I had seen advance scenes from *The Thief and the Cobbler [Arabian Night], Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and the genie ["Friend Like Me" sequence] in *Aladdin,* and experienced that rare "sense-of-wonder" deja vu.) Animation wasn't dead! Anything was possible! My personal faith in the medium was renewed. It was coming back and all anyone had to do to believe was to see this clip from (what was then called) *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH.*

In 1980, the Olivia Newton-John/Gene Kelly musical *Xanadu* was released. It contained a short animated sequence by Bluth which was a knockout. This studio was doing Disney better than Disney.

The Secret of NIMH
Courtesy of Jerry Beck

Supporting the Future of Animation

A few months later, in late 1980, I accidentally intercepted some interoffice mail heading for my boss. It was a deal memo stating that United Artists had just acquired *Mrs. Frisby/NIMH* and *Banjo.* I was working for the

company that was supporting the future of animation!

Though my department had limited involvement with Bluth, I made it my business to have as much involvement as possible. The coolest animated feature in years was going to be released

Dragon's Lair
Courtesy of Jerry Beck

by United Artists, and it soon became apparent that I was the only person there who knew about it and cared.

It was as lavish as anything from *Bambi* or *Fantasia*, only slightly subversive.

United Artists had a checkered past with animated features. *Yellow Submarine* (1968), *Lord of the Rings* (1979) and later *Rock & Rule* (1983) were its best known releases. The studio enjoyed more success on television with its syndication of the pre-1948 Warner Bros. and Popeye cartoons, along with DePatie-Freleng's Pink Panther menagerie.

Because my department was immediately able to release *Banjo* in 16mm, we required still photos, slides and other materials from Bluth. We had a small staff, so when it came time to request these things I made the call to Gary Goldman and immediately hit it off with him. He invited me to visit the studio if I ever came to Los Angeles and I took him up on his offer.

The following summer I vacationed in L.A. and San Diego, but the highlight of my trip was visiting the Bluth studio, then heavily into production on *NIMH*. The feeling of optimism was infectious. This wasn't just an animated feature, it was a cause. I came away knowing I had to do more to help.

A Full-Fledged Bluthie

Back in New York, I connected with *NIMH*'s unit publicist and concocted a slide presentation on the film which I presented at comic book conventions on the East and West Coasts. I was a full-fledged "Bluthie," preaching the gospel to whoever would listen.

In Spring 1982, I visited Bluth one more time and got a look at the most complete version of the film that one could see: the entire leica reel, mostly in color, except for the final reel. I was so happy to see this much incredible footage, I never asked about the final reel; besides, it gave me something to look forward to when the film was finished. But I should have suspected something. When I finally saw the finished film a few weeks later at a press screening, I was disappointed.

But the studio still held such promise. MGM/UA did a lousy job releasing the film, doing it regionally instead of nationally all on the same date. Summer 1982 also saw the release of Steven Spielberg's *E.T. The Extraterestrial*, which blew away all other family entertainment. *The Secret of NIMH* failed at the box office.

I had seen the future of animation and its name was Don Bluth Productions.

That failure caused Aurora to back out of producing Bluth's next film, *East of the Sun, West of the Moon*. Bluth's studio stayed alive animating two innovative video games, *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace*, which created a short-lived sensation in the summer of 1984. Luckily, through Jerry Goldsmith, who wrote the music for *NIMH*, Spielberg caught on to Bluth and *An American Tail* was released in 1986.

Xanadu, The Secret of NIMH, Dragon's Lair and *Space Ace* pointed toward a potential that has not been realized by the subsequent Bluth productions. But it was Bluth, Goldman, Pomeroy and 11 other renegades from Disney who, in 1979, caused a chain reaction which led to today's feature animation boom. They shared a dream for animation's future which has just begun to happen.

Jerry Beck is Vice President Animation, Nickelodeon Movies, in New York. He is also an animation historian, whose most recent book was The 50 Greatest Cartoons (Turner Publishing).

Lotte Reiniger

by William Mortiz

Lotte Reiniger, when mentioned at all, is most often brushed off in a single sentence noting that she apparently made a feature-length silhouette film in 1926, The Adventures of Prince Achmed; but since that was in Germany, and silhouettes aren't cartoons, Disney still invented the feature-length animated film with Snow White. Anyone who has seen Prince Achmed wouldn't be convinced by this reasoning, but, alas, only a tiny fraction of the people who see Snow White ever get to see any Reiniger film at all. Few of her nearly 70 films are readily available—and almost none of them in excellent prints; when Reiniger fled Germany to England in the 1930s, she was not able to bring her original negatives with her, so most modern prints are copies of copies, which have lost much of the fine detail, especially in backgrounds.

Portrait of Lotte Reiniger, Berlin 1918
Courtesy of William Mortiz

More than just noting that Reiniger's Prince Achmed, begun in 1923 and released in 1926, was a pioneer feature-length animated film, one must proclaim that it is a brilliant feature, a wonderful film full of charming comedy, lyrical romance, vigorous and exciting battles, eerie magic, and truly sinister, frightening evil. Our current prints of Prince Achmed were "restored" in 1954 with a new (rather kitschy) musical score by Freddie Phillips, which means that the images move faster than they should (18 frames-per-second silent speed versus 24 frames-per-second sound speed).

I love working for children, because they are a very critical and very thankful public.

The original symphonic score by Wolfgang Zeller, one of the great film composers, more correctly supports the drama with a thrilling grandeur, exciting suspense and lush romanticism. Furthermore, although the "restoration" reestablished the tints of the original, much of the fine background detail in most scenes is lost. (Original nitrate prints are available in Europe, so let's hope that a more authentic restoration becomes available soon.)

In addition to Prince Achmed, Lotte Reiniger made a second feature, Dr. Dolittle, released in 1928 (unfortunately just as the sound film began to triumph), with a musical score by Paul Dessau, Kurt Weill and Paul Hindemith. Following Hugh Lofting's 1920 book, The Story of Dr. Dolittle, it tells of the good Doctor's voyage to Africa to help heal sick animals. Again, it is currently available only in a television version with new music, voice-over narration and the images playing too fast.

Lotte Reiniger actually worked on a third feature as well. She

loved Maurice Ravel's 1925 opera *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* (The Boy and the Bewitched Things), which tells of a naughty child who ruins his schoolbooks and toys, hurts his pets, breaks dishes and furniture and despoils the garden—but all the things he has damaged come to life and accuse him until he repents. Both Colette's text (the "china" tea set speak the mock Chinese of "Hong Kong, Mah Jong" while the torn arithmetic book sings fragments of math problems) and Ravel's diverse music (from mock 18th-century shepherdesses, to jazzy fox trots to cat yawls to a symphony of garden sounds) are magical. Lotte tried for seven years to get the rights to the piece—a complex and expensive matter, since Ravel's music, Colette's libretto and the particular musical performance (singers, orchestra, etc.) had to be cleared separately. When Ravel died in 1937 the clearance became even more complex, and Lotte finally abandoned the project, although she had designed sequences and animated some scenes to convince potential backers and the rights-holders.

The Adventures of Prince Achmed, 1926
Courtesy of William Mortiz

In 1929 Lotte Reiniger had also directed a live-action feature, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, which involves people who run a shadowpuppet theater in a carnival—and starred Jean Renoir and Bertold Bartosch; unfortunately, it was begun as a silent film, and the attempt to add voices afterward proved disastrous.

The Adventures of Prince Achmed
Courtesy of William Mortiz

A Very Thankful Public

In addition to her feature projects, Lotte animated dozens of shorts for children, and a few delightful advertising films. In a 1969 interview with Walter Schobert (of the Deutsches Film museum in Frankfurt), Reiniger said "I love working for children, because they are a very critical and very thankful public." She has rewarded her youthful audience with challenging interpretations of classic fairy tales, new stories and some operatic motifs—all of which played successfully in cinemas and on television in the early years before ratings and commercial demands made children's TV a branch of the toy industry. Lotte also performed with live shadow-puppet performances in England, and wrote a

definitive book about Silhouettes.

Lotte Reiniger herself is the prime genius behind all of her films. She had an astonishing facility with cutting—holding the scissors still in her right hand, and manipulating the paper at lightning speed with her left hand so that the cut always went in the right direction. She drew the storyboards and devised the plots and characters, which were closely linked. If a figure needed to make some complex or supple movement, it would have to be built from 25 or 50 separate pieces, then joined together with fine lead wire—as in the famous Falcon that Walter Ruttmann used to make Kriemhilde's dream sequence for Fritz Lang's 1924 feature *Niebelungen*. If a character needed to appear in close-up, a separate, larger model of the head and shoulders would have to be built—as well, possibly, as larger background details to stand behind it. But Lotte worked always with her husband, Carl Koch, who usually ran the camera. For the large projects like *Prince Achmed* she had a staff of five: Carl for camera, Alexander Kardan to check the exposure sheets, Walter Türck who arranged the backgrounds, and two special-effects men, Walter Ruttmann and Bertold Bartosch; the latter two were animators in their own right, who were able to continue their own careers thanks to the help Lotte gave them with this extra employment.

Galathea, 1935
Courtesy of William Mortiz

Even if the prints are not in the best shape, it is worth trying to see as many of her films as you can, for Lotte endowed every tale with enchanting touches and droll social commentaries. The earlier films seem better to me. *Carmen* (available in the U.S. through New York's Museum of Modern Art), gives a feminist reappraisal of the opera's plot, making Carmen a capable and self-sufficient woman, smarter and stronger than the men who pursue her. The later films often have color backgrounds (being originally designed for television in England), the most easily available of them probably the National Film Board of Canada's *Aucassin and Nicolette*; the film follows a medieval tale of young lovers separated—and needless to say, it's Nicolette who is brave and clever enough to get them back together again.

In 1936, Carl and Lotte resolved to leave Germany for good, even if it meant a transient existence, which it did.

Lotte Reiniger: A Biographical Note & Filmography

Although not Jewish, Carl Koch and Lotte Reiniger were closely identified with leftist politics (Bert Brecht counted them among their good friends) and deplored the rise of Nazism. They immediately tried to leave Germany in 1933, but were not able to get emigration visas into France, England or other European countries. Lotte worked on a Pabst film in France in 1933, but had to return to Germany, where she made six more films, between frequent "vacations" to England, Greece and other places in search of asylum. In 1936, Carl and Lotte resolved to leave Germany for good, even if it meant a transient existence, which it did. Jean Renoir employed Carl in Paris, while Lotte found some backing for silhouette films in England—but both had to leave the country where they were every few months and reenter on a new tourist visa, sometimes only meeting in the terminals at Dover and Calais.

With the beginning of the war, Renoir arranged to take them to Italy, where he was contracted to direct a feature, which he soon turned over to Carl when he decided to return to France to salvage some of his father's paintings (and eventually fled to the US). Carl and Lotte worked on three features and a silhouette animation in Italy before they were evacuated to

Germany when the allied armies invaded Italy and the German forces began to retreat in 1944.

Even during the blitz on Berlin (in addition to caring for her aged mother and Carl, who suffered from "shell shock"), Lotte was forced to work on a silhouette film, which was finished after the war by the newly founded East German DEFA studios. Carl and Lotte finally managed to emigrate to England in 1949.

All films listed in the following list , unless otherwise noted, are short silhouette animations by Lotte Reiniger.

1916

Rübezahls Hochzeit (Rumpelstilskin's Wedding). Live-action feature directed by Paul Wegener. LR does silhouette cutouts for the dialogue-titles.

Die schöne Prinzessin von China (The Beautiful Chinese Princess). Live-action silhouette film, actors only seen as shadows on screen, directed by Rochus Gliese. LR does costumes, sets, special effects, etc.

1918

Apokalypse (Apocalypse). Live-action short directed by Rochus Gliese. LR's silhouettes depict the horrors of war.

Der Rattenfänger von Hameln (The Pied Piper of Hamelin). Live-action feature directed by Paul Wegener. LR made silhouettes for dialogue titles, and animated model rats.

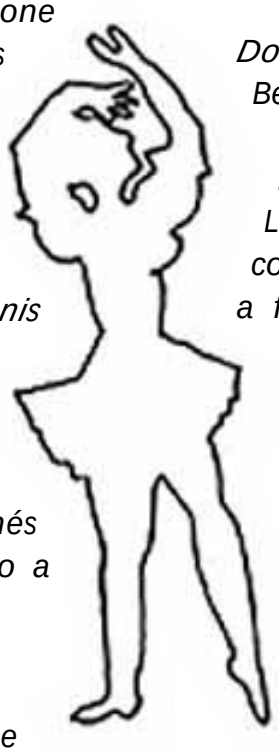
1919

Das Ornament des verliebten Herzens (The Ornament of the Heart in Love). First animated silhouette short by Reiniger.

1920

Der verlorene Schatten (The Lost Shadow). Live-action feature directed by Rochus Gliese. LR animated a sequence in which the musician has no shadow, but the shadow of his violin is seen moving on the wall as he plays his instrument.

Amor und das standhafte Liebespaar (Cupid and the steadfast lovers). Silhouette animation short with one live actor who interacts with the cutouts.



Several advertising films for Julius Pinschewer agency, including: *Das Geheimnis der Marquise* (The Marquise's Secret) for Nivea skin cream and *Die Barcarole* (The Barcarole) for Pralinés Mauxion dessert. Also a commercial for ink.

1921

Der fliegende Koffer (The Flying Trunk), based on the Hans Christian Andersen tale.

First trick-table (Berlin, 1920)
Courtesy of William Mortiz

Der Stern von Bethlehem (The Star of Bethlehem).

1922

Aschenputtel (Cinderella), from the Brothers Grimm.

Dornröschen (Sleeping Beauty), advertising film.

1923

Lotte Reiniger makes a complex silhouette figure of a falcon for a dream sequence in Fritz Lang's feature *Die Niebelungen*. Walter Ruttmann (who is working on Reiniger's *Prince Achmed* at the time) completes the dream with various painted images, and it becomes known as Ruttmann's sequence.

1923-25

Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed (The Adventures of Prince Achmed), 90-minute silhouette feature, from episodes in *The Arabian Nights.* Completed film submitted to censorship board January 15, 1926, press screening May 2, 1926, Paris premiere July 1926, Berlin first run September 1926. Original musical score by Wolfgang Zeller.

1926

Der scheintote Chinese (The Seemingly-Dead Chinaman). Originally a 13-minute episode in *Prince Achmed,* cut by the German censor, as well as French and German distributors in the interest of keeping the film within the attention span of children. Released as a short in 1928.

1927

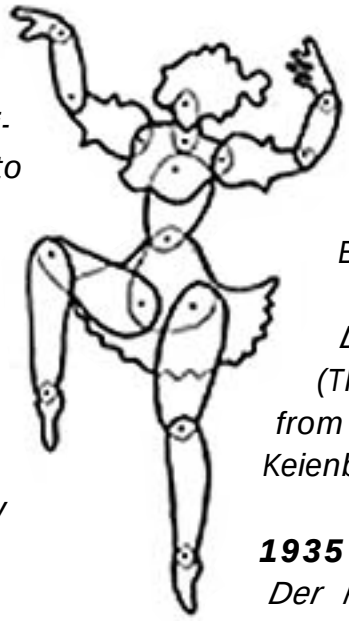
Heut' tanzt Mariette (Today Marietta Dances). Live-action feature directed by Friedrich Zelnik. Silhouette effects by LR.

1928

Doktor Dolittle und seine Tiere (Dr. Dolittle and His Animals), 65-minute feature after Hugh Loftings novel. At the Berlin premiere, December 15, 1928, Paul Dessau conducted a score with music by Kurt Weill, Paul Hindemith and himself.

1929

Die Jagd nach dem Glück (The Pursuit of Happiness), live-action feature codirected by Rochus Gliese and Lotte Reiniger. Tale of people who run a shadow-puppet theater in a carnival. Includes a 20-minute silhouette animation by Reiniger to represent one of the theater performances. Stars Jean Renoir, Catherine Hessling and Bertold Bartosch. Premiere (with voices added by other actors): May 1930.



1930

Zehn Minuten Mozart (10 Minutes of Mozart).

1931

Harlekin (Harlequin), 24 minutes, to baroque music.

1932

Sissi, 10 minute silhouette animation prepared to be shown during a scene change of the Fritz Kreisler operetta *Sissi.*

1933

Don Quixote. Live-action feature directed by G.W. Pabst. LR animated silhouettes for opening sequence in which Don Quixote reads a book about knights' adventures.

Carmen, based on the Bizet opera.

1934

Das rollende Rad (The Rolling Wheel). Traces society through the changing role of wheels from antiquity to the present. *er Graf von Carabas* (Puss-in-Boots), from the Brothers Grimm.

Das gestohlene Herz (The Stolen Heart), from a fable by Ernst Keienburg.

1935

Der Kleine Schornsteinfeger (The Little Chimneysweep), from a tale by Eric Walter White.

Galathea, from the classic fable.

Papageno, scenes from Mozart's opera, *The Magic Flute.*

1936

The King's Breakfast, from the poem by A.A.Milne.

1937

The Tocher (Scottish dialect for "The Dowry"), advertising film for the General Post Office.

La Marseillaise Live-action feature directed by Jean Renoir. LR prepared a sequence of a shadow-puppet theatre performance depicting the need for the French Revolution.

1939
Dream Circus, after Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* (unfinished by the beginning of the war).

L'Elisir D'Amore, after Donizetti's opera.

1944
Die goldene Gans (The Goose that Laid the Golden Eggs), after the Brothers Grimm. (Unfinished.)

1949
Greetings Telegram. Ad for General Post Office.

Post Early for Christmas, ad for G.P.O.

Radio License, ad for G.P.O.

1950
Several advertising films for Crown Film Unit in London, including *Wool Ballet.*

1951
Mary's Birthday Black silhouettes over colored backgrounds.

1953
Aladdin

The Magic Horse, from *Arabian Nights.* (Much of the footage from this film and *Aladdin* seem to have been culled from *Prince Achmed.*)

Snow White and Rose Red, from the Brothers Grimm.

1954
The Three Wishes, from the Brothers Grimm.

The Grasshopper and the Ant, from LaFontaine's fable.

The Gallant Little Tailor, from the Brothers Grimm.

The Sleeping Beauty, from the Brothers Grimm.

The Frog Prince, from the Brothers Grimms.

Caliph Stork, from the fairy tale by Wilhelm Hauff.

Cinderella, from the Brothers Grimms.

1955
Hansel and Gretel, from the Brothers Grimms.

Thumbelina, from Hans Christian Andersen.

Jack and the Beanstalk, from the Brothers Grimm. Color backgrounds.

1956
The Star of Bethlehem. Color backgrounds.

1957
Helen La Belle, after Offenbach's operetta, *La Belle Hélène.* Color figures and backgrounds.

1958
The Seraglio, after Mozart's opera, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail.* Color figures and backgrounds.

1960
The Pied Piper of Hamelim. Made for the Christmas Pantomime at the Coventry Theatre, where it played between acts. Fgures and backgrounds in color.

1961
The Frog Prince, for Coventry Theatre Christmas Pantomime. Figures and backgrounds in color.

1962
Wee Sandy Intermission piece for Glasgow Theatre production.

1963
Cinderella Made for the Coventry Theatre Christmas Pantomime. Figures and backgrounds in color.

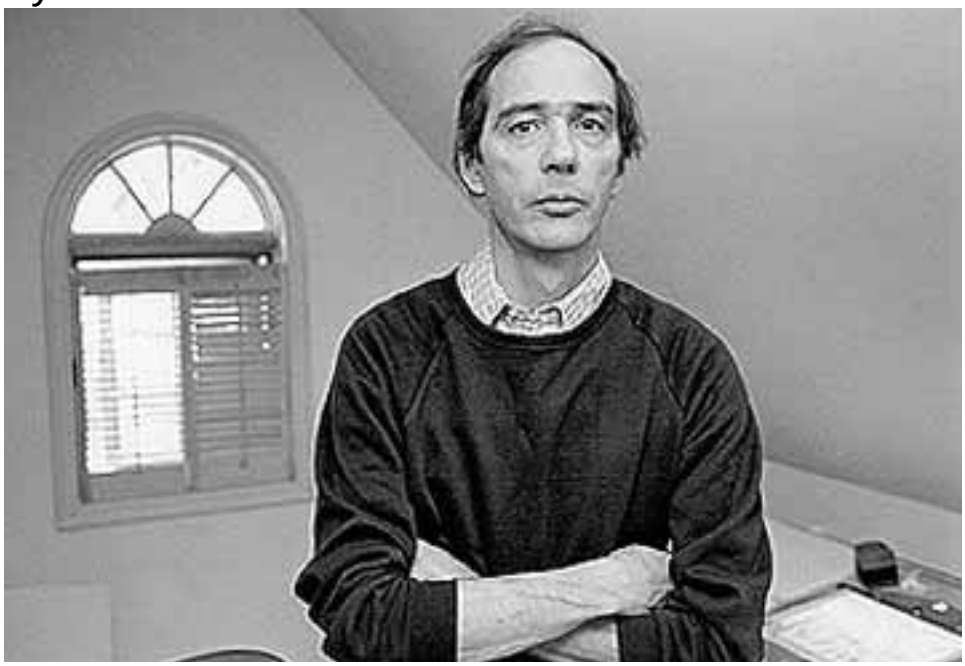
1975
Aucassin and Nicolette, after the medieval cantefable. Produced at the National Film Board of Canada, with black figures and color backgrounds.

1979
The Rose and the Ring, after W.M. Thackery's tale. In color.

William Mortiz teaches film and animation history at the California Institute of the Arts.

CABIN-FEVER ANIMATION

by Gene Walz



Richard Condie
© The National Film Board of Canada

Somehow Winnipeggers have once again survived a brutally Siberian winter. This one was, officially, longer, colder, and snowier than it's been in generations. Six months of snow-cover. Daily wind-chill warnings: Exposed skin freezes in 10 seconds. Almost all of January and February spent below -20.

It was marrow-freezing, eyeball-aching weather. Momma, stop chug-a-lugging the Prozac weather. Also: perfect animation weather!

Bears hibernate. Middle Americans vegetate. Winnipeggers animate. And enough of them kept their Jack Frosted noses to the pegboard this past winter to make 1996 look like it's going to be a banner year for animation. Everyone, it seems, from internationally famous Richard Condie (Getting Started, The Big Snit, The Apprentice) on down has a film nearing completion.

An Auspicious Beginning

Neil McInnes (Boarding House, Transformer) is the first Winnipeg animator to hit the screens in 1996. It's an auspicious beginning for the community. Lovehound is a send-up of a classic love story done in classic cel animation style. Ronnie the Realtor browbeats Knucklehead Pete who is smitten by the lovely Ethel, Ronnie's opportunistic mistress. Ethel spurns Pete until Pete accidentally proves his manliness. In the end, Pete gets what he wants but not quite what he expected.

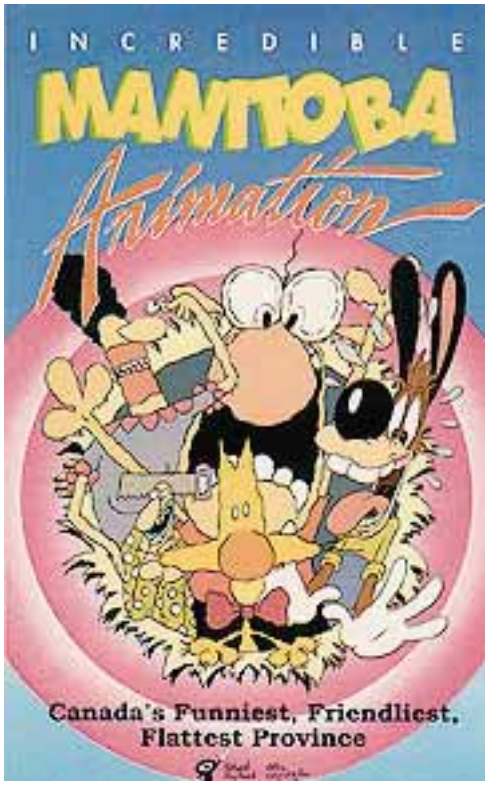
It's momma, stop chug-a-lugging the Prozac weather. Also: perfect animation weather!

If the story structure sounds familiar, it is deliberately so. After a couple of cryptic early films, McInnes wanted to "play with some dopey clichés." And play he does, to hilarious effect. Ronnie the Realtor is a nattering, manic lover whose macho posturing produces some of this movie's funniest gags, featuring exaggerated love bites and tongue kisses. Lovehound's best sequence, a tense and crazy chase edited and scored like a Hitchcock montage, ends when Ronnie's fast black car hits poor Pete's dog, and Ronnie plays hackiesack with the inert pet. Some of the humor is decidedly twisted. In fact, there is probably something here to offend everyone.

But gags and sick humor are not Lovehound's outstanding feature. McInnes has taught animation for years and it shows in the well-crafted squash and stretch animation and the beautifully designed backgrounds. He gives the movie a polished retro-look, recalling the buildings and furniture from the 1939 New York World's Fair. Most indoor scenes have an offbeat deep-focus effect achieved by placing kitschy lamps prominently in the foregrounds.

As is typical of most Winnipeg animation, this one also has a rich, multilayered soundtrack. The music, composed by Boyd MacKenzie, is thick with marimbas and flamenco guitars, as befits a Latin lover villain, but the overall effect is more like a Bernard Herman score.

Lovehound is both vulgar



Cover from *Incredible Manitoba Animation* video.
© The National Film Board of Canada

and sophisticated, tasteful and tasteless. It begins like *Metropolis.* Many of its backgrounds are postcard pretty. It's got a bad Elvis look-alike and other fifties stereotyped caricatures. Its jokes are often crude. It ends feeling like a Generation X movie. It is a refreshingly eclectic mix of pleasures.

Sweat and Agony

Paul Ulrich's new film, *Love Means Never Asking You to Shave Your Legs,* should have been the first Winnipeg animated movie of 1996. But a criminally incompetent courier lost his negative and sound mix. It's taken four months of sweat and agony to reconstruct things.

The story behind the movie is even more interesting. A couple of years ago the local CBC radio station ran a Valentine's Day contest. They were looking for new love songs for the nineties. Although Ulrich did not win the contest, his submitted lyrics were good enough for the CBC to set them to music, record and broadcast them. Then last year he won the Best Animation Film trophy at the Manitoba Film Awards (The Blizzards, what else?) with a crazy little film called *Silence of the Clams.* That was enough encouragement to convince him to animate his own song.

Love Means... is a country and western tune sung by Jim Desjarlais. Its wry three-minute story is about a woman who refuses to shave her legs and the sensitive guy who stands behind her. It should have people laughing and line-dancing in the aisles.

Several of the Winnipeg members of the Manitoba Society of Independent Animators have spent the winter doing short animated inserts for the Canadian version of *Sesame Street.* Although the amount of work has been scaled back somewhat in recent years, the quality remains unexpectedly high. One of the reasons is that the local animators have decided to use the children's television work as a testing ground for their own personal projects.

Bill Stewart, for instance, did two inserts of a minute or less each. In *Shape Man,* about circles, squares, rectangles, and triangles, he worked on more detailed character design and on acting through the animation. In *3-2-1-0,* he experimented with flash frames and smoke effects like the ones in *Aladdin.*

Alan Pakarnyk, whose psychedelic *Carried Away* is featured on the NFB's video *Incredible Manitoba Animation,* tried his hand at computer animation for the first time. Using Swivel 3-D software on an Apple 840 AV to build his characters, he told a brief story about a man and his cat. Bob lifts the cat up; when the cat objects, he puts it back down. Not so simple *Up and Down.*

Anita Lebeau took time out from her own eight-minute animated film, *Louise,* to work on two *Sesame* inserts. *The Letter S* is an exercise in wit, characterization and timing. In it a spider sews a sweater for a skunk shivering in a snowstorm. *Twelve Flies* is a simple lesson complicated by the fact that it was two minutes long and filmed without cuts.

Jason Doll used the *Sesame* commission to test out color, line, and characterization for his upcoming film *Santa's Gotta Gun.* This film is definitely *not* for kids. In it, a thug busts out of jail, kills a Salvation Army Santa, and then hides out in a men's room. A child almost as persistent as the feline nemesis in Cordell Barker's

A thug busts out of jail, kills a Salvation Army Santa, and then hides out in a men's room.

The Cat Came Back has to be dealt with in increasingly violent and amusing ways.

Santa's Gotta Gun and *Louise* may need another horrible Winnipeg winter to bring them to completion. Likewise, the much-anticipated projects by two of the city's premier animators: Oscar-nominee Cordell Barker and Genie-winner Brad Caslor.

After a back ailment caused him serious delays on his project

Ronnie the Realtor from Neil McInnes' Lovehound.
© The National Film Board of Canada

On TV, Caslor has a new storyboard and is building momentum again. This darkly humorous examination of the effects of the tube on people's behavior promises an entirely new look for Caslor's work. Unlike the marvelous pastiche of forties cel animation (especially Bob Clampett) that made Get a Job such a sensation, this one will be done entirely on paper with black and colored pencil drawings.

Barker has expanded his original nine-minute film Strange Invaders into a 22 minute opus. It's about a thirtysomething couple who question whether they should start a family. In the middle of the night a strange child is delivered to them, and it is not exactly an answer to their prayers.

Strange Invaders will have a hokey 1950s sci-fi look to it, along the lines of Invaders from Mars and The Thing. It's hard to predict when it will be ready, as Barker keeps getting tempted away by commercial work. Most recently, he has animated a series of television ads for the phone company of Quebec. Unfortunately, you have to live there to see any of his work lately.

He attributes his decision to try the computer to " Thaddeus Toad syndrome."

Doing New Things

Winnipeg's other celebrity animator, Richard Condie, has been squirreled away for the past several years in his workroom on the second floor of his River Heights bungalow. He has been assiduously mastering the intricacies of computer animation. He attributes his decision to try the computer to "Thaddeus Toad syndrome." Like the Toad in the Hole in The Wind in the Willows, he must do new things. The resulting new film, La Salla, will be released this summer.

La Salla is well worth the wait, but Condie is not entirely sure about the Herculean effort. There were disconcerting surprises at every turn and frustrations galore. The original machine he was using developed 32 different hardware failures before he tossed it out. When he finally got comfortable with the replacement (a Silicon Graphics Indigo Extreme with a 2 gigabyte hard drive and 256 megs of RAM), he realized that "the choices can drive you nuts!"

The Softimage 3-D (version 3.0) software made discipline paramount. "If you had a permanent income, you could go off somewhere and play with it for an entire lifetime and still not exhaust the possibilities," he marveled. The wave effect, for instance, which the company included to animate flags, could be used, Condie discovered, for solids as well. So he used it to animate the firing of a cannon. The cannon is only one weapon in the weird arsenal of comic effects in La Salla. Turn on the laugh meter for this one!

The story is simple. A Condie-boy (unnamed in the movie but called "Adam" in the script) plays with his toys and is tempted by the door leading out of his room. That's not everything, but it's enough. For the story is really in the toys and the way Adam plays with them. Among other things, there's a mechanical fish, a peculiar three-dimensional Etch-a-sketch plus TV thing, and the aforementioned cannon which shoots out cows instead of cannon balls.

Much of the inspired zaniness that Condie is renowned for comes from bizarre distortions of the familiar and an exaggerated soundtrack. There are the usual gurgles and gasps and an-

guished howls here, but the real treat comes from Condie's return to his first love—music. (He has composed music for other people's films.) *La Salla* is not spoken; it is sung. And I don't think it's giving away too much to provide one of the film's best recitative lines: "Moments ago I had everything. Now there's a cow in my nose."

Condie describes *La Salla* as a combination of *Genesis-2* and *Paradise Lost.* (When was the last time you heard a filmmaker put those two sensibilities together?!) He's being modest, of course, and he should toss in *Toy Story* and *Saturday Night Live*'s Opera Man. And up the comic ante by a lot.

The Big Snit
© The National Film Board of Canada

This is everything you'd ever want in a Richard Condie film and more. It's a computer-animated Richard Condie film. The jokes, characters and props are the same, but this is a staged performance rather than a series of drawings. Which means Condie gets to play with the camera and the lighting and the props. All this makes for a darker, more cluttered image than is his won't, and it probably underlines the seriousness of the endeavor and the message as well. Luckily, it does not diminish his signature zany humor.

Much of the inspired zaniness that Condie is renowned for comes form bizarre distortions of the familiar and an exaggerated soundtrack.

Condie's films have always been true auteur films. Perhaps more so than any other animator he puts his own experiences in his work. There's no mistaking that the piano player in *Getting Started* is the filmmaker himself. *La Salla* is another one of these personal parables. The boy playing with his toys is not so terribly far away from the artist playing at his computer. (And thank the Lord for that!) Stuck in his room and trying to laugh and make the best of it. Parody and paranoia.

This is Condie's special territory, but it is not entirely unique to him. Cabin-fever animation. It's what a lot of Winnipeggers do.

Gene Walz is head of the film program at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg. He is currently finishing a biography on character designer Charlie Thorson and is now editing a book called Great Canadian Films.

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The Trance Experience of Zork Nemesis

by Donna La Brecque

It's backed by a million-dollar marketing campaign and generates a fevered buzz in well-traveled chat rooms. It offers at least one technological first. And its earnings are likely to exceed the box office of some major motion pictures. It's Activsion's new, hybrid animated-and-live action offering, Zork Nemesis.

Okay, but numbers aside, does this latest installment of the ongoing Zork saga have something to say about the role and destiny of animation in the world of CD-ROM entertainment?

At Activision's headquarters in Los Angeles, producer Cecilia Barajas sits surrounded by magic posters from the turn of the 19th century and a spate of merchandise spawned by the title. Besides her producer's credit, Cecilia shared in the writing and directed the adventure's interactive segments. No rank newcomer to the Zorkian underworld she: As Associate Producer of the company's successful forerunner, Return to Zork, Cecilia has, for now at least, traded in her previous role as a Los Angeles deputy district attorney to serve as Activision's interactive alchemist.

For all the richness of the game's environment, it's built on good, sound three-act bones. The petite and understated producer turns out to be less an advocate of the newest and the latest than an admirer of books and literature.

Alexandria Wolfe holds a secret that players must uncover to solve the mystery of *Zork Nemesis*
© Activision

First, a bit of orientation: Zork's Forbidden Lands universe includes five uniquely different worlds, hitherto unexplored: Temple, Monastery, Castle, Asylum and Conservatory. They're decidedly well fleshed out, as alternative worlds go: Zork Nemesis occupies a lot of space—three CD-ROMs worth, including thousands of 16 bit animations and nearly an hour of live-action video in a "prerendered" game environment. The Nemesis ' soundscape, too, is omnipresent. With the toot of a fleezle, we enter...

I tried to maintain a way to imbue the image with a sense of emotional content.

The original Zork is generally acknowledged as the grandaddy of all interactive adventure games. Why has it survived?

The early Zorks were text adventures. This is a very powerful medium because it is words. With words we can convey nuance and tone. With Zork Nemesis, we took those givens and started to expand upon them. Two years ago, Return to Zork was such a big deal because it was a CD-ROM at a time when CD-ROMs were new to the marketplace—and the first graphic adventure with-in the series.

Up until very recently, at least, it seems CD-ROM animation has too often happened without serious art direction...

I was going for something that has generally been very underused: a sense of visual authorship. It's done in film all the time—production design is really, really important to establishing a great movie. Underusing visual authorship represses a way of creating emotions. In the game experience, visuals are incredibly important. So, with my art dir-ector, Mauro Borrelli, I tried to maintain a way to imbue the image with a sense of emotional content. So, rather than the image saying, "Oh, here's a temple," it feels desolate and stark and barren -- in a very particular way.

Also, by borrowing some of the same postproduction technology that film and television use, we created a greater realism

than computer games usually have. We could add to the established animation incredible details—flames leaping from a book, the real time flicker of a candle, the planetary system that glows brighter and brighter, spinning rings—some pretty cool stuff. Combined with Mauro's background as a production designer, director and illustrator on major motion pictures, we were able to hone in on the environments.

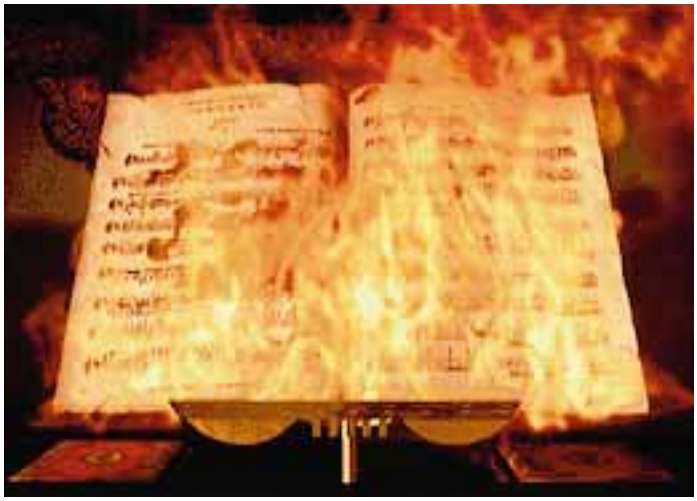
But how good does the animation really have to be to communicate story in a video game?

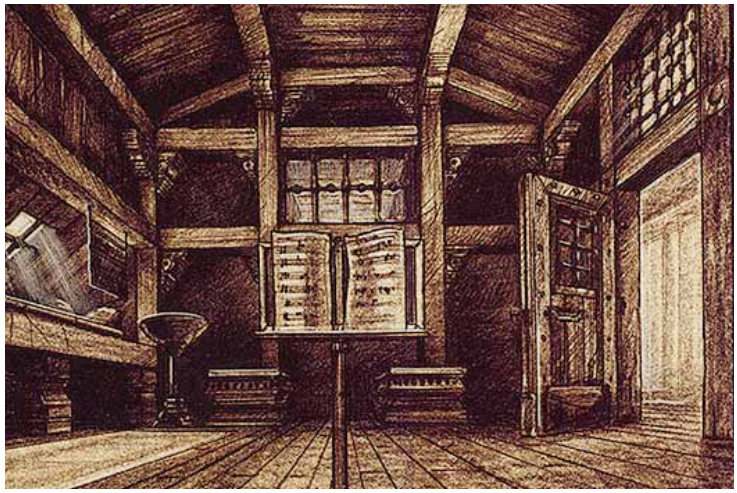
Great animation is one of the keys to visual authorship. And you can't find "how to" books on this subject in the bookstore. I came up with an approach in this game: I stitched in little pockets of narrative where I could and exploited the tools I had to work with. I started first with the graphics. And then video, text and audio. Unlike a movie, where you're pretty much strapped down and made to watch events in a given order, *Zork Nemesis* has a very nonlinear environment—but I still wanted to communicate the core story within a complex framework. Like with the animation: Putting animation over a surround image is fairly complicated. And some of our compositing involves both live action and animation. The initial computer graphic image is created geometrically, with all of the textures created over a layer of basic geometry, just as the way the skeleton gives you the general outline of a body. So, for example, we can animate a scrapbook filled with theater posters and make you feel like you're actually thumbing through the pages of antiquity—and then boom! Time changes and a performance begins.

Great animation is one of the keys to visual authorship. And you can't find "how to" books on this subject in the bookstore.

You've got a lot of components working together here: sound and animation, complex animated flythroughs swooping into a prerendered environment, varying styles of animations that look clinically eerie in one world and appropriately delicate in another. When do you sit back and say, too much?

You keep experimenting, adding and taking away. You try not to become too attached, too excessive. Then discipline sets in. You think about timing and the pace of the storytelling, how many puzzles you need to solve. Practicality. You know it's not a quick action game, so you're not going to get the adrenaline—the kill or be killed buzz—like other games give you. But we wanted each of the environments to be distinctive—that was one of the givens. We tried to give the Asylum a direction like the movie *Brazil,* in terms of feeling both technological and old and rusty, like you'd need a tetanus shot if you fell. That's going to be embellished.

Also, I used other things like symbology for clues. There's a big piece of animation when the sun and moon are joined. With Activision's newly developed 360˚ perspective called Z-Vision, the animation looks seamless. That's pretty much never been done before, especially using surround perspective in a prerendered envi-

The burning book of sheet music of one of the many animated clues in Zork Nemesis
© Activision



Sketch of the burning book.
© Activision

Sketch of the underworld in *Zork Nemesis*
© Activision

ronment with animation and live-action video. All of it was done on high end SGI's. We used 16 meg graphics, which occupy a lot of space because of their thousands and thousands of colors. But all of this allows you to have amazing images which get loaded into memory. Having enough memory is still one of the constraints in the technology.

It seems there's new technology every day.

Games in general are the wave of the future. The power of the written word will always be maintained, but I think we're moving into an even bigger direction for interactive games. I think they will actually cut into the film industry. They're the most nihilistic form of entertainment: you start out knowing that whatever you create will be obsolete by the time you finish it. For example, huge storage capacity on a CD is right around the corner. Right now, we're constrained by about 500 megs of information, and graphics alone take up a lot of it. But as we keep investing in our graphics, the quality will keep getting better and better. At this time, standardization is impossible.

Even though the underworld was already established in the Zork series, you could say that you've taken the game into, what, a darker place?

Yes, a much darker direction. It's got a very surreal and macabre tone to it. We were even able to get animations into distorted images by compositing them onto computer graphics with this really great machine called a DP Max. For example, an animated violin floating from a coffin might pique your interest. And the strains of a violin solo. You become keenly aware of everything around you. I call it the trance experience. It's very much enhanced with music and surround sound. Wherever you are, it can slow you down at a rate slower than your heartbeat.

They're the most nihilistic form of entertainment: you start out knowing that whatever you create will be obsolete by the time you finish it.

Donna La Brecque is a writer based in Los Angeles. Her e-mail address is elbcie@aol.com

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DO YOU HEAR A WHISPER IN YOUR GHOST?

By John R. Dilworth

Ghost in the Shell
© Manga Entertainment

"In the near future ... the advance of computerization ... has not yet wiped out nations and ethnic groups." This is the opening text of Mamoru Oshii's (Patlabor I & II, Twillight Q.) incredible new animated feature, Ghost in the Shell. The year is 2029, and if you prefer you may trade in your body for a cybernetic one. Of course you may keep a few original cels from your brain and hopefully some of the memories you've spent a lifetime storing. This is how the world has become. After surviving World Wars III and IV, a few changes have altered the way humans existed after thousands of years of genetic evolution. Man and machine have become one and now the machine part craves for inde-pendence of being human.

Not since Akira has an animated feature from Japan (Japanimation) delivered such eye widening visuals and thought challenging content. Inspired by the manga created by Masamune Shirow (Appleseed, Dominion), it is reportedly the most expensive anime created at approximately $US10 million. Ghost features credits for things like "Weapon Design," as well as an international lineup of executive producers led by UK's Manga Entertainment. It is a shame that, at this writing, Ghost In the Shell, has no major distributor in the United States.

Programming of a cyborg from *Ghost in the Shell*
© Manga Entertainment

Daring You to Follow Along

In New York, the principles of Anime Crash, a growing chain of retail stores devoted to all things anime and manga, and participants in helping to bring Ghost wider exposure in the States, said Miramax was set to handle Ghost distribution domestically but passed at the last hour. And this is where the chink in the shell of Ghost is found. The narrative and multiple plots are extremely challenging. The story opens near the end and the end closes at the beginning. The film almost dares you to follow along.

And if you luckily possess the ability of advanced comprehension, you will be derailed by a character's unexpectedly long monologue so rich in observation and obtuse thinking, you will find your mind spinning for 10 minutes attempting to figure it out. This is what could have been the factor behind Miramax deciding to pass on Ghost (It should be kept in mind that Miramax is a Disney company and I cannot remember the last time Disney promoted an animated feature other than its own. Recall the recent rerelease of The Lion King? Ask yourself what other animated feature was opening that month. Historically, there were two Alice In Wonderland animated films, but you only know about one of them.)

The challenging narrative is something I respect and ultimately frown on. Ghost deserves a wide release. It is far more entertaining than most of what comes out of Hollywood. Yet the author and director chose to alienate Western audiences in most part by accepting to stand behind the film as a visual tour de force. I certainly wouldn't want to compromise artistic vision, but if the concept is to broaden the understanding of Japanese culture, an effective area to impress a market is in filmmaking. The plot does kick in midway through the film, but if you do not get the story the first time, maybe you'll have to see it again and maybe again. If spending your afternoons at the movie theater is not possible, then you may have to accept the film as eye candy. And what candy it is.

Motoko's partner in Security, Bateau in *Ghost in the Shell.*
© Manga Entertainment

The story opens near the end and the end closes at the beginning. It almost dares you to follow along.

The Noise in Her Head

The film begins with a computer generated, multi-leveled grid of a section of a city and the viewer is completely immersed in the grid by flying through it and around it. Motoko Kusanagi is a high level officer with Section 9 (the security police) engaged in surveillance high on top a skyscraper roof. In the back of her neck are four ports in which she could jack into any computer network. Motoko also has a cybernetic body. The noise she hears in her head during this opening sequence is very important in the arc of the main plot. When the order to move in is given, Motoko stands, disrobes revealing a beautifully slender and athletic body (reminding one of a naked Barbie doll with smaller breasts), and with outstretched arms backdives off the roof. When the mission is concluded, the next time you see Motoko,

you don't. It is one of the most exciting opening sequences in cinema today.

The opening sequence reveals all the ingredients that will make up the next 75 minutes. Ghost combines traditional hand drawn, 2D and 3D animation. All the mediums are neatly balanced and integrated in a way that tells you something new is going on here but doesn't distract from the important stuff, the characters. Granted mixed media technology is not new to animation, but what is notable is the execution and the mastery of the craft. Art direction, the ability to showcase detail and stage passive or active action, and lead one's eye through color and composition is a tenet of high art. Look at the paintings of Vermeer or Rembrandt and all will be revealed. The opening titles are an excellent example of art direction. Witness how a cybernetic body is manufactured while Japanese drums beat behind an angelic chorus of female vocals. Here you are led visually as well as audibly.

Ghost feels more like a live-action movie than what one is accustomed to think animated features look like. The animation is not based on the style that evolved out of years of exploration by the artists who created the classic Disney films. It more closely resembles how humans really move and the way the Japanese interpret human movement, slightly stiff and restrained, but deliberate. It is very understandable, knowing how formal Japanese culture is, that distractions like eye popping special effects, outrageous characters and stories, hyperunrealistic action and long legged, Western styled women reign.

The Real Celebrities

The real celebrities in Japan are not the Hollywood imports but the creators of manga, and it is the only area where a woman is as equal as a man. We may never see fluid squash and stretch from anime, but when was the last time you tried tap dancing when you felt constrained spiritually? It cannot be done. There are many shots where live action seemed to inspire movement and tone. An early scene shows Motoko waking in the dark and sitting up, opening the blinds to let the light in. She is groggy with thought and slightly lethargic. The feeling was beyond animated. It is a wonderful hybrid that Ralph Bakshi felt somewhere in his bones but was never able to transmit onto the screen.

Motoko disrobes revealing a beautifully slender and athletic body, reminding one of a naked Barbie doll with smaller breasts.

Motoko, the main character in Ghost in the Shell.
© Manga Entertainment

Another shot that has caused some debate is one where two government officials are riding down a glass elevator with their backs toward the camera while having a 20 second (film time) conversation. The only movement is the panning background and a sliver of jaw moving on one of the characters. The big question is why? The shot shouts, "Look at me!" What could the director, Mamoru Oshii, be trying to say? Surrounded by action heavy scenes, it could be that he was sharing his feelings with his audience. In a display of directorial freedom, we could have witnessed a deliberate recession of craft. What is it like to have dramatic action, but not be able to express it through movement? Animation is so much about the ability to express freedom without limitations. Given a clean sheet of paper, how would you express motion? That would depend on several factors.

One factor is how you interpret your environment. Ever go abroad and discover new things and appropriate only what you can? Acceptance of diversity will inspire and the lack of acceptance will limit. This is echoed through Motoko herself during a chase scene. "If we all reacted the same we'd be predictable. And there's more than one way to view a situation. What's true for the group is also true for the individual. It's simple. Overspecialize and you breed in weakness. It's slow death." Certainly the overwhelming social codes of behavior and public conduct

have long been the issues explored by Japan's influential creators.

Individualism and Personal Destiny

The feelings of individualism and personal destiny are strong undercurrents in Ghost. All the leading characters are fighting for it, or fighting to understand how they fit in with the big picture. The argument is raised about the importance of being human and is clearly answered. When cyborgs begin wanting a destiny and, more important, want to make the decisions that will create their destinies, the desire to be held or kissed or loved is not one of them. And that is what being human is about.

Clearly to have the ability to jump 50 floors above the ground, become invisible and have a perfect body that only requires yearly tune ups is attractive. But if tenderness through the grasp of a baby's tiny fingers cannot be experienced, I'd rather expire with the dinosaurs than trade my human shell for one made by MegaTech, with a corporate logo etched under the foot and a warranty. Shirow and Oshii do suggest that the cyborgs of Ghost have feelings and desires. They can be subtly caring and have pure feelings of dedication and devotion. They have transcended the complexities of human needs and self-gratification. Yes, it is true that the cyborgs want, but they were originally created to perform so the hybrid would be a new species of individual, one that cannot succumb to emotional manipulation.

During the final scene,

When was the last time you tried tap dancing when you felt constrained spiritually?

Bateau, Motoko's partner in the security police, leans over her destroyed shell and the two of them continue a conversation. Although her shell is no longer functional, Motoko's robotised brain is and that is the part that Bateau recognizes. It suggests the higher belief that the spirit or soul does exist outside the human body that confines it, of reincar-

The surreal vision of director, Masamune Shirow.
© Manga Entertainment

nation and the hope of an afterlife. Many of the same themes are found throughout history, especially in Egypt during the age of the Pharaohs.

Not surprisingly the translation of Ghost into the English language version is very adequate. There are a few voices that sound remarkably like Don Knotts and Casey Kasem. The actor who voices Motoko, Mimi Woods, is very believable and satisfactorily appealing. She is able to convey a detached emotionalism and yet at the same time add a hint of melancholy that makes her sympathetic. It also doesn't hurt to see a cyborg go scuba diving in a frog suit as a means of meditating. The film's sound design is very even and well balanced.

In an attempt to broaden the film's appeal in the West, the producers commissioned Brian Eno and U2 to contribute a tune which turns up over the end credit crawl. The original soundtrack was composed and performed by Kenji Kawai. And I recommend you purchase the CD—pricey since it is an import, but what a treat. Throughout the film there are transitional scenes that are several minutes long and linger on: rain falling on city streets or a passing barge floating a consumer product advertisement or naked mannequins waiting to be dressed in a showroom window. Over these visuals pound the eerie percussion and meditative synthesized keyboards that inspire you to sit back and float away as you are lured into a cinematic hallucinogenic. Here the use of traditional native music is embraced and the original soundtrack features 11 tracks that echo a spiritual and transcendental awareness or desire. Interestingly the Eno/U2 cut does not appear on the Japanese soundtrack.

The Puppet Master

For clarity sake, 'Ghost' is the term used for the stored memories, real and manufactured, that are placed in cyborg machin-

The birth of Motoko—*Ghost in the Shell*
© Manga Entertainment

ery to make them more human. 'Shell' are the bodies the machinery are housed in. The main plot is about a program titled 2501 "The Puppet Master" designed to hack into foreign network systems for the use of manipulation for economic or military advantage. When the program begins to develop its own sense of self, it designs a hugely elaborate plan to free itself from its originators and create a new, more advanced species that do not require any human limitations ultimately. When the agency responsible for the Puppet Master tries to retrieve the wayward program by any means necessary, the Security Police get involved with Motoko taking the lead.

In the end, all the characters fighting each other, or fighting to defeat the presumed enemy, were all puppets under the Puppet Master. The program manipulated its way through various individuals one at a time until the final outcome was achieved. When the merging of The Puppet Master and Motoko is completed, the new individual stands overlooking a huge metropolis like a virus about to be released into a computer hard drive and all hard drives connected to it.

It is a not too happy an ending. The evolution of man rests in man's ability to overcome limitations. And the survival of man rests in man's ability to limit his hunger for evolution. It is a genetic program for man to move forward. But whether technology holds the key to the future of man, the question remains to what outcome. As the cyborgs in Ghost are tormented about their destinies, so humans face the same predicament. If we are in fact masters of our own destiny, why are there so many lost souls struggling to find their way amidst a sea of limitations?

John R. Dilworth is a New York based independent filmmaker whose recent short animated film, The Chicken From Outer Space, *was nominated for an Academy Award.*

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DESERT ISLAND SERIES

Independents on the Shore!!

compiled by Frankie Kowalski

It takes unique talent, persistence, and lots of creative confidence to be an independent filmmaker in today's animation global market, especially in the feature film arena.

I had a chance to catch up with some of the best for this month's island retreat—Bruno Bozetto (Allegro Non Troppo), Richard Williams (The Thief and the Cobbler [Arabian Knight]), R.O. Blechman (L'Histoire du Soldat) and Bill Plympton (The Tune).

Bruno Bozetto's top 10 picks if stranded on a desert island...

"Personally, if I were stranded on a desert island I prefer taking Sharon Stone rather than 10 films."

1. *8 1/2* by Frederico Fellini
2. *Fantasia* by Walt Disney
3. *Stagecoach* by John Ford
4. *The Gold Rush* by Charlie Chaplin
5. *Amarcord* by Fredercio Fellini
6. *Mr. Hulot's Holidays* by JacquesTati
7. *Bambi* by Walt Disney
8. *Star Wars* by George Lucas
9. *The Shining* by Stanley Kubrick
10. *Dances with Wolves* by Kevin Costner

"Working on an independent production taught me to give the right importance to the artistic ideas, never forgetting the commercial side of the matter. Sometimes it is exhausting to create under these conditions, because you are directly involved artistically and financially, but the liberty of action you have is absolutely invaluable".

Richard William's top 10 picks ...

1. *Rashomon* by Akira Kurosawa
2. *Seven Samurai* by Akira Kurosawa
3. *Ikiru* by Akira Kurosawa
4. *Yojimbo* by Akira Kurosawa
5. *High and Low* by Akira Kurosawa
6. *The Quiet Duel* Akira Kurasawa
7. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* by Walt Disney
8. *Dumbo* by Walt Disney
9. *City Lights* by Charlie Chaplin
10. *Babe* by Chris Noonan

Bruno Bozetto's Allegro Non Troppo

Funniest cartoon:

King Size Canary by Tex Avery

Best timing ever:

One Froggy Evening by Chuck Jones

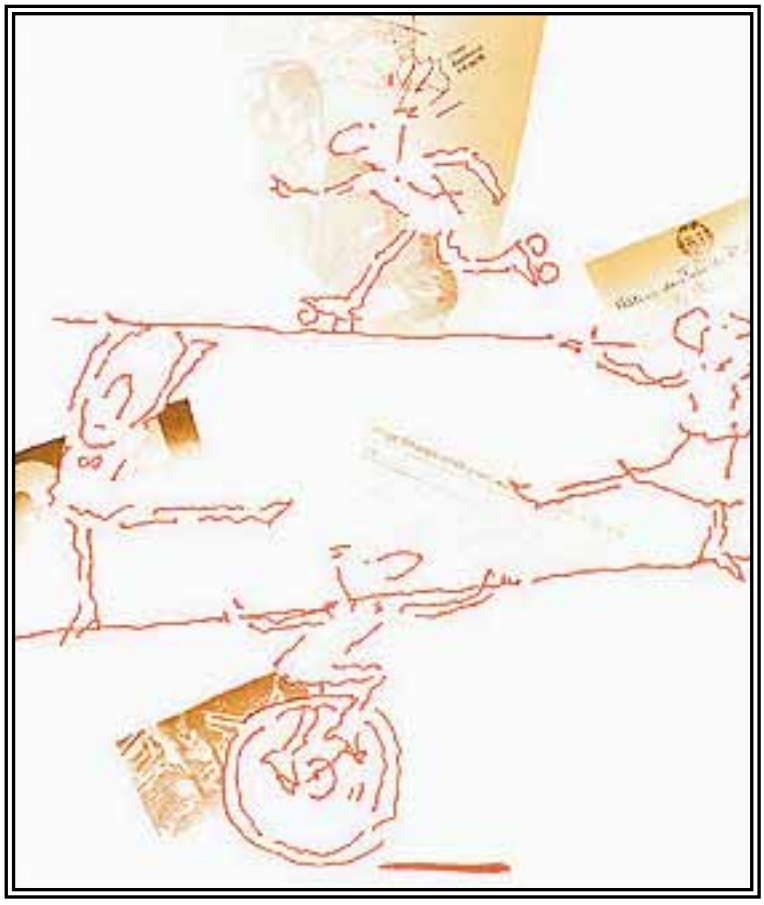
Bill Plympton's top 10 picks ...

1. *This Is Spinal Tap* by Rob Reiner
2. *Arsenic & Old Lace* by Frank Capra
3. *It's A Wonderful Life* by Frank Capra
4. *Dr. Strangelove* by Stanley Kubrick
5. *Baby Doll* by Elia Kazan
6. *The Producers* by Mel Brooks
7. *Reservoir Dogs* by Quentin Tarentino
8. *Akira* by Mamoru Oshii & Katsuhiro Otomo
9. *The Beast of the City* by Charles Brabin
10. The Tune by yours truly

"This is probably a very incomplete list since 1) I haven't seen many films in the past several years and 2) I don't remember the names of some favorites (such as a Canadian film which came and went like a meteor. I saw it in The New York Film Festival several years ago, and it never found distribution. The Subject matter? A Canadian woman impregnated by an Italian tomato—I'm not making this up!) Anyway, here's my incomplete list... "

R. O. Blechman's top 10 picks ...

1. *Citizen Kane* by Orson Welles
2. *Breathless* by Jean-Luc Godard
3. *Hate* by Mathieu Kassovitz
4. *LaAmercia* by Gianni Amelio
5. *Woman in the Dunes* (*Suma no Onna*) by Hiroshi Teshigahara (after all, I am on a desert island so I'd like the company.)
6. *A Sort of Autobiography* by Akira Kurosawa
7. *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann (It's set in Switzerland, so that's nice for desert reading)
8. *War and Peace* by LeoTolstoy (The Simon & Schuster edition because it has a separate glossary of characters.)
9. *Ulysses* by James Joyce (because I never finished it).
10. *The Idiot* by Feodor Dostoyevsky (I read it years ago and loved it.)



Serigraph poster done by Blechman for exhibition at Gallery Bartsch and Chariau, Munich.

© R. O. Blechman

NEWS

The Third Oslo Animation Festival: A Special Report by the Festival's Vibeke Christensen. *The Nordic Animation competition, held April 25-28, 1996, was attended by over 3,000 people, with over 800 coming to a special children's day featuring screenings and workshops. For the first time, the Festival included a competition category for Nordic and Baltic countries, and included 45 films. The members of our jury were: Paul Driessen from the Netherlands, Marv Newland from Canada, Bettina Bjrnberg from Finland, Abby Terkuhle from USA, Alexander Tatarsky from Russia and Turid Versveen from Norway. The prize winners were:*

Special Jury Prize: *Little Lilly (Mati Kutt, Estonia). The prize was given for the film's beautiful, inventive and surreal imagery, as well as its painterly, strong visual style. The jury liked its combination of background and foreground. They felt its mood was striking and was personal and showed a unique point of view. They commented on the original storytelling by noting that, the film has a unique and individual narrative structure. It uses a fractured structure, yet tells its story well. The jury also pointed out that it was not dependent on dialogue to tell its story, and that the visuals alone communicated everything clearly.*

Best Commercial: Linetest (Jonas Dalbeck/Stig Bergquist, Sweden). In evaluating this category, the jury was initially undecided regarding the criteria for a prize winning commercial. Should the idea be considered at all?... or only the execution (or animation), since the ideas in this case often are dictated by someone other than the artist. They felt that most of the commercials included in the competition category were too conventional; they noted that although they felt that they were well produced and technically well done, but that they did not necessarily communicate a product or message well. Only one entry seemed to combine all that is necessary to make a strong enough statement, i.e., Linetest, which they felt combined a good idea with good execution. The jury felt it was beautifully timed, had good animation, and worked excellently as an informative commercial using a style that will appeal to a certain segment of the population, and a situation that clearly illustrates the intended message.

Best First Film: *Processor (Jan Otto Ertesvg, Norway). The jury greatly appreciated seeing an experimental film as a debut film. They mentioned that this is the stage where an artist should be experimenting, in order to find his or her own style. They also acknowledged the importance of this stage, in that animators eventually must take things like clients and money into consideration. They chose Processor because it shows that the artist has a great understanding of film, and explores in a simple way the possibilities of the medium. The film is a good combination of video technology and old fashioned materials, i.e., paper. The jury also remarked that the sound and image were well put together, that they seemed "made for each other." They felt it was obvious the artist had a vision of what he wanted to do, and used simple technology to create it. The jury noted that it was a brave and successful experiment, that showed an understanding of the arts and of film.*

Grand Prize: *1895 (Priit Pärn/Janno Poldma, Estonia). First of all, the jury unanimously felt that this was the obvious and easy choice as best film—the film stands in a class by itself, noting its originality, good design, strong style and its joining of powerful images with humor. They praised the fact that the film demands something from its audience. It is complex in what it is communicating, in terms of both style and idea. "We think the Lumière Brothers would be happy with this film."*

Audience Prize: *Narverfredag (Friday Night Fever) (Christopher Nielsen, Norway).*

The following films received special mention in Marv Newland's summary from the Jury: Leikr (Journey Towards Light) (Runi Langum, Norway), Mons the Cat (Piotr Sapegin, Norway) and Daughter of the Sun (Anita Killi, Norway).

Film Roman to Go Public. *The North Hollywood-based studio, best known for its work on such TV shows as Garfield & Friends, The Simpsons and The Critic, announced that it will soon be making its initial public stock offering of 3.6 million shares, with existing shareholders possibly selling an additional 185,000 shares. The company, founded by former Bill Melendez director Phil Roman in 1984, thus joins such other North American independent animation houses as Nelvana and Cinar in going public.*

Disney and McDonald's Finalize Cross-Promotional Agreement. *The Walt Disney Company and the McDonald's Corporation announced the decade-long agreement, which makes the international restaurant chain Disney's primary promotional partners. As a result, McDonald's will have exclusive rights to include toys from the latest Disney films, videos and TV shows in their kids meals. For the past few years, the rival Burger King chain had greatly expanded its market share through its tie ins with such Disney blockbusters as The Lion King, Pocahontas and the upcoming The Hunchback of Notre Dame.*

Japan's Gaga Communications Enters Feature Animation. *The film, The Voltage Fighters "Gowcaizer," is based on the popular computer game released last fall by Techno Japan. Gaga, which produces films for both the theatrical and home video markets, will utilize its "its expanded mixed-media release pattern" for Gowcaizer.*

Engage Signs Exclusive Content Deal

With Interworld Productions. *Engage Games Online has announced that it has entered into an agreement with Interworld Productions to distribute the company's "online multi-player games." The first two titles to be released under the agreement will be Rolemaster: Megaßstorm (based on the series created by "paper game publisher" Iron Crown Enterprises) and Splatterball (a version of Paintball). The games, which will be available on Windows 95, will accommodate up to 40 and 20 players respectively.*

Shadbolt's Paintings Are Touched Alive by Vancouver Animator: *Filmmaker Stephen Arthur has animated a series of 30 paintings by 87-year-old Canadian painter Jack Shadbolt in a short film titled Touched Alive: The Masque of Desire and Doom. While Shadbolt is critical of popular animation, he has entrusted Arthur to do "a serious and original job" of his paintings. Arthur, who used a "consumer-level personal computer" to make the film, holds graduate degrees in both film production and brain physiology.*

E3: NEWS AND COMMENTARY

Some Thoughts on E3: *The second edition of E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo) the major video/computer game expo was held in the Los Angeles Convention Center, May 16-18, 1996. Presented by the Interactive Digital Software Association, the trade show was bursting at its seams and often resembled a giant penny arcade, with game freaks grossing out on the latest from Nintendo, Sega and 3DO, seemingly oblivious to the fact that they were supposed to be there on business.*

An instant success in its premiere outing last year, it has now outgrown its L.A. venue, and will be moving on to Atlanta, which boasts larger facilities. While some game/interactive producers may be less than happy with the move away from Hollywood, one supposes this is the price of success. For many, the big news was the long awaited debut of ***Nintendo's*** *new 64 bit cartridge game system (Nintendo 64) and of new games such as Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire, along with Super Mario 64. The latter really seemed to impress many visitors, though I really couldn't see what was so special about Mario running at high speed through a rather primitive 3D environment. But then again, the game's the thing and with memories of what Welltris did to my carpal tunnel syndrome, I was not about to tempt fate. (The Beavis and Butt-Head CD-ROM, at the* ***Viacom New Media*** *booth, with Beavis (or is it Butt-Head) lobbing globules of saliva off the roof of their high school was more my style.) Anyway, why be a spoilsport and let Nintendo and the twilight of cartridge game systems have its due.*

Also creating some buzz, this time among animation types, was the preview of the clay animated CD-ROM, The Neverhood Chronicles ***(Neverhood),*** *created by Douglas TenNapel, to be one of the first releases from* ***DreamWorks Interactive.*** *TenNapel, whose previous games include Genesis J-Park and Ren and Stimpy's Invention, is perhaps best known as being the creator of the Earthworm Jim character. The latter was spun off into a animated TV series produced by Universal Cartoon Studios for the WB Kids. Given DreamWorks' strong commitment to traditional animation, it may very well also get serious consideration for making the jump from Windows 95 to the boob tube.*

Our resident animator, Wendy Jackson, went gaga over the new Simpsons CD-ROM due out at summer's end. She notes that, "It enables you to create original animation with all The Simpsons' characters, with your own scenarios. It's not a game, but it's real cool. It's really putting the interactive in the interactive."

DVD (Digital Video Disk) was also on a lot of people's mind, although it could only be sampled in a small aerie in the ***Philips Media*** *booth. This, if you haven't heard, is designed to be a replacement for CDs, CD-ROMs and laserdiscs. With at least four times the capacity of CD-ROMs, it is also being hailed as a replacement for video tape in the home video market. More than one wag suggested that, as far as the game market goes, it was strictly an interim technology, given the thrust of the industry to multiplayer online games. The only thing holding it back, it is said, is a lack of "bandwidth."*

While new online, multiplayer games are already beginning to proliferate, I somehow do not think that the onset of larger capacity cable modems (or whatever) will obviate the need for devices like DVD players. All the hype surrounding the online gaming concept is one of those ideas which, like the 500 channel cable systems popular a few years back, seems just a bit overblown and perhaps a bit premature.

—Harvey Deneroff

E3 Announcements *... Not surprisingly, there were a whole slew of new titles announced at E3, including the de rigueur online games. What follows is a sampling of some new titles that feature animation of some sort or another:*

Humongous Entertainment, which specializes in interactive animation for children, unveiled their newest character, Pajama Sam, who stars in No Need to Hide When It's Dark Outside., as part of the company's Junior Adventures line of CD-ROMs. Due out in September, deals with Sam's attempts to overcome his fear of the dark. The company also launched its Junior Arcade line of "nonviolent" action games for youngsters, including Putt-Putt and Pep's Balloon-O-Rama., Putt and Pep's Dog on a Stick, Freddi Fish and Luther's Water Worries and Freddi Fish and Luther's Maze Madness, which are all due out later this year.

Pajama Sam's room in No Need To Hide When Its Dark Outside
© Humongous Entertainment

Microsoft, *which was crowing about how its Windows 95 oper-*

ating system is becoming "the gaming platform choice for 1996," previewed several games at E3. These included: *Deadly Tide* (a futuristic, "high-speed underwater action-thriller" developed by **Rainbow Studios** and TRG3, featuring 3-D graphics); developer Terminal **Reality** has come up with *Hellbender* (a sci-fi shoot-em-up between "the evil Bion aggressors and The Coalition of Independent Planets) and *Monster Track Madness* (a truck-racing simulation); and The *Condemned* (a futuristic TV game show from **Gray Matter,** where prisoners battle each other for freedom). It will also be releasing the newest installment of its *Magic School Bus* series done with **Scholastic,** *The Magic Schoolbus Explores Inside the Earth.* In addition, Microsoft will be coming out with a PC version of *GEX,* the comic console game, and *Microsoft Flight Simulator for Windows 95*, the newest incarnation of the classic simulation game.

Philips Media, fresh from its announcement "to jointly develop and market CD-ROM software titles for children" with the **Children's Television Workshop**, took the opportunity to show off *Down in the Dumps,* which was developed by France's **HaïKu Studios.** The London Effects and Animation Award nominee attempts to mix adult humor and slapstick with the game play, which involves a family of eccentric, thumb-sized extraterrestrials who land in "a stinking dump" on planet Earth.

Virgin Interactive Entertain-ment, noted for such CD-ROM classics as *The 7th Guest,* previewed a number of titles for a variety of platforms. Very prominently displayed was *Toonstruck,* a CD-ROM game combining live-action and animation from its Burst division; it stars Christopher Lloyd (as an animator on the Saturday morning *Fluffy Fluffy Bun Bun Show*) and the voice talents of Dan Castallanetta, Tim Curry, David Ogden Stiers and Dom DeLuise. In the action adventure category, it showed off *Heart of Darkness,* from Paris-based **Amazing Studio,** as well as new entries in the *Command & Conquer* real-time strategy game series (*Command & Conquer: Red Alert*) and the Lands *of Lore:* adventure/role playing games (*Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny*). For children, Virgin showed the latest of the Spot video games based on the popular children's books, *Spot Goes to Hollywood.*

Activision said it had signed a representation agreement for its best-selling *Pitfall* franchise with The Rothman Agency for developing possible television, video and comic book projects, though it initially intends to focus its efforts on getting an animated TV series off the ground. In the meantime, it showcased a bunch of new game titles at E3, including: *Hyperblade,* a real time, multiplayer item that features futuristic versions of such sports as hockey, lacrosse and speed skating; *Interstate '76,* a combat simulation game where players face off against a gang of auto mercenaries; *Blast Chamber,* where players must stay one step ahead of their opponents maneuvering through a maze of obstacles; *Time Commando,* where players become virus exterminators thrown into a time warp caused by a computer virus; and The *Elk Moon Murder,* a detective story set in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Cold Blooded
© 7th Level

Former Don Bluth animator Dan Kuenster gets credit for strutting his stuff in *The Great Math Adventure starring Howie Mandel,* the latest in the Lil' Howie's Fun House series from **7th Level.** Mandel as usual provides the voice of Lil' Howie and gets producer credit. Also previewed was *The Universe According to Virgil,* which features Charles Fleischer (the voice of Roger Rabbit) as a German scientist who goes over volumes of information specifically from the *Columbia Encyclopedia,* and *Cold Blooded,* an action-adventure game about half-mutilated universe threatened by a tug-of-war between warring gods. Dr. Suess' widow (Audrey Geisel) was present at the **Living Books** booth to give a send off to the interactive version of her husband's Green *Eggs and Ham*:, which is slated for an early fall release. ... **Bullfrog Productions** previewed *Dungeon Keeper,* where players assume the role of the sinister title character, who is presented their version of a "360 degree fully-rotational, texture mapped" environment. ... Finally, while MGM Interactive was showing off its *Babes in Toyland* CD-ROM (based on its upcoming direct-to-video feature), Disney Interactive was doing the same for its *Disney's Animated Storybook, The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Disney Activity Center, Toy Story.*

Virgil Reality - The Study
© 7th Level

Animation World Magazine 1996 - 1997 Calendar

Coming Attractions...

Next month, join us in celebrating the Olympics, as we look back at the Olympiad of Animation from the 1984 games and take a look at the production of The Great Adventures of Izzy, Film Roman's TV special featuring the Atlanta Game's mascot.

Rita Street will profile Sue Loughlin and her new public service announcement for Amnesty International, while Jill McGreal will look at John Coates and his London-based TVC (TV Cartoons), which is closing after 40 years. In addition, Giannalberto Bendazzi will help us celebrate the centennial of Quirino Cristiani, the Argentine filmmaker who made the world's first animated feature back in 1917 Also, William Moritz will take a look at Disney's The Hunchback of Notre Dame, while Harvey Deneroff examines what's behind all those Hunchback clones that are popping up at your local video store.

The Spirit of the Olympics	*(July)*
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